



Thursday, March 2, 2017

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ARMED POLICE STORM MERRY HILL – FOR TERROR TRAINING



Armed officers take up position in the shopping mall

THIS was the dramatic scene as armed police took over intu's Merry Hill shopping centre in a training exercise preparing of ficers for the possibility of a terror attack.

Police carrying automatic rifles took up positions outside Nando's restaurant, as actors posing as victims laid strewn across the floor of the Black Country shopping centre.

Images of the operation, which took place on Sunday night and was not publicised in advance, were released to the media on Monday.

Police said they had kept the operation secret to allow the emergency services to respond as they would in a real attack.

It is one of a number of exercises that have taken place across the country to

prepare for the threat of an attack by 'ma- rauding gunmen', following in the wake of attacks in France and Germany.

A West Midlands Police spokesman said: "The area was tightly controlled and there was no impact on the public."

Activity

"Officers and security staff were on patrol during the night to reassure any local residents who may have been affected by increased activity, noise and presence of the emergency services. However, it was business as usual for the force and officers."

Dan Murphy, general manager of intu Merry Hill, said: "We took part in a live training exercise with local emergency ser-

vices to test their response to a major incident."

"We were delighted to be able to help the emergency services – who work hard to keep our community safe – with one of their regular, planned exercises."

It was reported last summer that Britain's security services were probing at least four plots to commit terrorist atrocities, with shopping centres and stadiums thought to be at particular risk in the UK.

One of the most notorious terror attacks of recent years was at the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya. In 2013 Al-Shabaab gunmen murdered 67 people and wounded more than 170.

● More pictures – page 3

Gridlock fear if main rubbish dump moved to Brierley Hill

CALL FOR U-TURN ON TIP CLOSURE

DUDLEY Council bosses have been urged to re-think plans to close Stourbridge tip and shift operations to Brierley Hill.

Dudley Council has come under fire over its proposals to shut the borough's main dump on Birmingham Street and redevelop the Leys Depot in Brierley Hill for increased use.

Several opposition members made their feelings known at a full council meeting on Monday night.

They questioned the judgement of proposing to put a main tip near to the Merry Hill shopping centre and spoke of the resulting potential for gridlock on the roads.

There were also claims that the move would be unfair to people living in Stourbridge and Halesowen as they would face longer journeys to get to the refuse site.

Conservative councillor Les Jones, who represents Pedmore and Stourbridge East, predicted chaos on the roads around the major shopping centre if the move goes ahead.

He said: "Let's look at a bank holiday, when Merry Hill gets more traffic than ever and the tip gets more traffic than ever and you're going to put the two together?"

Lorries

"If you live in Stourbridge you will have to go up the main A491 or through Merry Hill. Either one of these roads will be in gridlock. This is simply a bad idea."

Fellow Tory councillor Ruth Butterly, of Hayley Green and Cradley South ward said: "Going to Merry Hill on Saturday will be gridlock with people going with trailers and lorries to get to the site."

Gornal Conservative councillor Anne Millward said: "We need to make sure it is going in the best place."

"If it is not the right place then we will have to look elsewhere."

Report by Richard Guttridge

She added: "Getting into the middle of Brierley Hill is an absolute nightmare."

Halesowen Tory councillor Karen Shakespeare said: "I have been contacted by people in Halesowen and Stourbridge who are concerned about the tip moving to the centre of Brierley Hill."

"I would like to be assured work will be done to look at the road infrastructure."

Under the plans, the Stourbridge tip site would be sold off and council chiefs have insisted that Leys Depot, on Leys Road, Brockmoor, is more suitable for a tip and could take visits from more vehicles.

Dudley Council's environment boss Councillor Hilary Bills explained that the proposals were in the early stages.

"It has got to be subject to planning consent, highways assessment and consultation with the Environment Agency," she said.

"If it doesn't work out, yes we will have to find another site."

Birmingham Street has long been the borough's main site for waste disposal. It is open 9am to 5pm every day during winter.

Shock as thieves steal wheelchairs



Sports coach Dale Rudge at Crystal Leisure Centre in Stourbridge with sports wheelchair user Jake Jones

A SPORTS teacher has spoken of his disabled pupils' heartbreak after specialist wheelchairs were stolen.

The equipment, costing £18,000, was stolen from the back of the Crystal Leisure Centre in Stourbridge on February 22 but was found on the side of a road in Bromsgrove five days later, although some were damaged.

The wheelchairs are especially adapted for chil-

dren and young people with disabilities to use during sport and are vital for people with disabilities who want to take part in sports.

Sports development officer Greg Southall secured funding for the wheelchairs and regularly works with the children. He said: "The kids at the school were heartbroken. It was devastating."

Dudley Council will repair the damaged fabric seats of the specialist wheelchairs.

PETITION

4,491 sign support for leisure centres

A PETITION against the potential closure of three leisure centres in Dudley borough has now closed, reaching its deadline with a total of 4,491 signatures.

Protesters previously stated that they would be pushing for a full council debate on the matter after they reached the milestone of 3,000 signatures.

Dudley Council wants to demolish Halesowen Leisure Centre, Dudley Leisure Centre and The Crystal Leisure Centre in Stourbridge, and then build two new centres, probably in Dudley and Lye, to save money.

Development boss Councillor Khurshid Ahmed said it was likely to be another three years before the plans came to fruition.

HERITAGE

Cone and have a say on museum

VISITORS to a new glass museum in the Black Country have been given the chance to have their say on what the attraction should feature.

Consultants are working to fit out the White House Cone museum of glass in Wordsley, former home to Stuart Crystal.

Visitors were invited to have a say on how they want the £780,000 museum to look and can still have a say by emailing jl.alexander@btinternet.com or bfg@britishglassfoundation.org.uk

EMERGENCY

Ambulances will be based at fire stations

STOURBRIDGE and Cradley Heath will each get ambulances based at their fire stations under new emergency service plans.

Rapid response vehicles serving the two areas will be replaced by fully kitted out ambulances that will be based at Stourbridge Fire Station and Haden Cross station. West Midlands Ambulance Service bosses say the move will improve patient care.

More than 85 per cent of incidents in the two towns are already responded to by ambulances rather than rapid response cars.

INSIDE

ON THE RUN
FOR CHARITY



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National TV plea over murder suspect



Niron Parker-Lee – dangerous

A NATIONWIDE television appeal was launched on Monday to catch a dangerous man wanted by police over a murder in Brierley Hill.

A photograph of murder suspect Niron Parker-Lee was being screened on Crimewatch on BBC One.

He is wanted in connection with the death of Mansoor Mahmood, who was stabbed to death in Brierley Hill's High Street on October 15.

Despite an appeal by West Midlands Police and the offer of a £2,000 reward, Parker-Lee has evaded officers.

A police spokesman said: "We have

asked Crimewatch for help to trace the whereabouts of Parker-Lee. Many people watch the show and it is another avenue we can use in our pursuit of the suspect."

There has been no update on the investigation since an appeal was issued back in November.

Mr Mahmood, aged 24, of Bague Walk, was stabbed in the stomach with a knife in the High Street shortly before 5pm on October 15, staggering into a fast food outlet before collapsing onto the floor. He later died in hospital from his injuries.

Detective Inspector Harry Harrison said he believed it was a targeted attack.

Officers scoured CCTV and named 19-year-old Niron Parker-Lee, also from Brierley Hill, as the key suspect.

He said: "Someone knows where this man is and I'd remind them that harbouring a wanted man is a criminal offence."

Parker-Lee was described as dangerous, and the public urged not to approach him. Any sightings of Parker-Lee should be reported to police on 999. Or call Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Police used batons on fans after derby clash

FOOTBALL supporters were hit with batons by police following Friday night's game between Wolves and Birmingham City, which Blues won 2-1.

West Midlands Police has launched an investigation into the incident, which happened close to a subway under Wolverhampton railway station.

Nick Glynn, a retired policeman and Blues fan, captured the moment officers appeared to wield the weapons against Blues supporters on video.

He said he saw officers strike fans with the batons, adding: "It appears to me that the use of force by the police was excessive."

"What threat level do you need to strike someone somewhere where you could kill them? There should be an investigation into what the police did."

Mr Glynn, who was a police officer for the Leicestershire force for 31 years and now works for a human rights organisation, came across the disorder while on his way to the station from Molineux.

He said: "It looked like the fans reacted to being pushed by the police down a bottleneck. There was this absolute pressure to force them through a gap, which was too small. When they did not move immediately, the disorder happened. It lasted for about five minutes."

The 16 seconds of footage shows officers striking supporters with batons.

Match commander Chief Inspector Nick Rowe said officers were "forced to quell the disorder and used appropriate and proportionate force" in a "very challenging, yet isolated incident".

Three in accident taken to hospital

THREE people were taken to hospital following a serious crash on a main road near Kingswinford.

A 67-year-old woman driver was taken to the major trauma centre at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham with chest injuries and suspected broken ankle after the accident last week.

The other driver, a 40-year-old man, was sent to Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley with lower back pain.

His passenger, a 49-year-old woman, was also sent to Russells Hall with bruising to her chest and abdomen caused by the seatbelt.

Thirteen firefighters were sent to the scene of the accident on the A449 near Ashwood Nurseries, Wall Heath, as were two ambulances and paramedics.

MEP fears EU move to block Brexit

WEST Midlands UKIP MEP Bill Etheridge has warned Britain risks being "held to ransom" by other European Union members unless it leaves the bloc as soon as possible. Mr Etheridge, also a Dudley councillor, said he feared an attempt to block Brexit via "rule changes".

Raring to go for Action Heart run



Jane Pugh, her son Gabriel, aged 12 and Louise Sanders get set for the five-mile Action Heart run this weekend

FUNDRAISING runners are lacing up their running shoes ready by the annual Action Heart five-mile charity event in Dudley on Sunday morning.

Starting and finishing at Russells Hall hospital, the event which is now in its 27th year raises thousands of pounds for the Dudley-based cardiac rehabilitation programme.

Jane Pugh, secretary of the Action Heart running club, said: "It is the perfect first race for people,

who would like to run or prefer to walk.

"Years ago it first started off as a way for people to regain their fitness level after coming off the cardiac programme, but now anyone can take part to raise funds."

"It starts and finishes at the hospital and then does a loop around the area from Himley Road, then up by Gornal Crematorium and down to the Pensnett Road."

There are prizes at the end for the fastest female or male – but ul-

timately anyone who wants to have fun can get involved."

Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Mohammed Hanif and his wife, Mayores, Zabeda Khanam will officially start the event at 9.30am.

The Action Heart programme in Dudley has been in existence since 1978. The Action Heart Centre is located in Russells Hall Hospital, providing exercise and lifestyle management for cardiac patients.

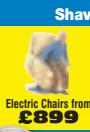
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Paedophile used hidden camera to film a child

A 35-year-old man from Cradley Heath who used a hidden camera to film a child, and downloaded and shared hundreds of indecent images of children, has been jailed.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard how Paul Mann, who had no previous convictions, began searching for indecent material after being introduced to a file sharing website to download music.

Mann also used a camera hidden in a shoebox to film a child and on two occasions 'manoeuvred' his victim.

Prosecutor Mr Christopher O'Gorman outlined how on November 3, 2015, police officers from the child sexual exploitation team carried out a raid at the defendant's home on Woodhouse Way after being alerted to his internet use.

During the search officers found two laptops and a memory stick, with the majority of the indecent material discovered on a laptop hidden in a bedroom wardrobe.

A total of 317 indecent photos and films, including seven Mann recorded, were discovered. Mann was sentenced after pleading guilty to two counts of sexual assault against a child, two counts relating to the production of indecent images of a child, three counts relating to downloading indecent images of children, and three counts of distribution. Mann will serve half of his 42-month sentence in custody. Officers also found 68 cannabis plants at his home. For two drug offences he received two-month jail terms, to run concurrently.

Fatal reaction to anaesthetic

A MAN died after he suffered a massive allergic reaction to anaesthetic given to him in an emergency operation.

Paul Footman, of Terrace Street, Brierley Hill, was being treated at Russells Hall Hospital on November 2 last year when he suffered the reaction.

The 54-year-old was rushed to hospital for an operation to his arm but suffered a cardiac arrest during the procedure when he went into anaphylactic shock in the operating theatre.

Black Country coroner Zafar Sidique gave a verdict of accidental death because of the 'reaction to the anaesthetic' and said Mr Footman had suffered a 'massive allergic reaction'.

Wolves profit but Villa make big loss

WOLVES have announced a profit for the last financial year – as Aston Villa revealed shock losses of £81.3 million. Molineux bosses revealed their £5.8m profit was mainly down to the sale of Benik Afobe.

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Father died after he wasn't told about tumour



Wayne Evans, of Sedgley, with wife Clare

A FATHER-OF-TWO has died after doctors forgot to tell him about his deadly tumour.

Wayne Evans, 41, from Sedgley, was suffering from severe stomach cramps when he was sent for tests but, after hearing nothing back from his GP, he assumed his results were normal. But three years later, Mr Evans began to deteriorate and after visiting his doctors was left shocked to be told a mass was found on his previous scan and that he required urgent care.

The tumour was by then inoperable

and despite undergoing chemotherapy, he died in 2013.

Now, the GP practice – Ridgeway Surgery in Sedgley – has agreed to pay a six-figure damages settlement to his wife, Clare, after his scan results were filed away.

Clare, 45, a sales assistant, said: "My life with never be the same, I cannot accept that Wayne's fate lay on a piece of paper for three years."

"He was forgotten about and it wasn't until he went back in pain that alarm bells started ringing."

"Wayne was shocked when his doc-

tor asked if he'd had any follow up appointments as he'd never been contacted after the initial tests."

"His tumour had been left to grow for three years and by the time they tried to operate, it was far too advanced and he died in 2013."

"If it had been removed when he had the first tests, it's likely he would be cancer free today and we wouldn't have such a gaping hole in our family."

Ridgeway Surgery were unavailable for comment at the time of going to press.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Big spring clean backed by council

COUNCIL chiefs are backing a national campaign aiming to get half a million people tackling litter this spring.

The Great British Spring Clean will be rolled out for the first time across the UK in March. Dudley Council is encouraging groups and individuals to help pick up litter across the borough.

Volunteers will be given free refuse sacks and can borrow litter pickers, gloves and other equipment. The council will collect the bagged waste.

For details email street.cleaning@ Dudley.gov.uk or call (01384) 814591.

Tenants urged to give their views

COUNCIL chiefs in Dudley have asked all of the borough's 22,000 housing tenants for their views in a survey to update the housing board.

The housing board is reviewing its constitution to 'ensure it is best placed to make positive contributions in the future'.

Residents can share their comments about the document online at www.dudley.gov.uk/housing. Housing boss Councillor Gaye Partridge said: "The board has an important role to play in ensuring that the council provides the best housing service it can."

60 new homes for Rose Hill site

A SCHEME to build more than 60 homes has been backed by planning officers at Dudley Council.

The homes are proposed for Quarry Bank on Rose Hill.

A total of 42 houses would be built under the plan with a mixture of two and three storeys, together with 21 apartments located in three separate blocks.

As part of the project the derelict Albertine House would be demolished to make way for the new homes.

Copper piping is stolen from supermarket

METAL thieves struck at the Waitrose supermarket in Stourbridge, stealing copper piping from the branch.

A large amount of copper was stolen from inside the store at the Ryemore shopping centre during the early hours of Monday, February 20.

Police spokeswoman Sharn Braich said: "Police were alerted to the theft of a large quantity of copper pipes from the Waitrose store in Stourbridge. Anybody with any information is asked to contact 101."

Pub spirits pinched

POLICE are appealing for information following a burglary at a Wetherspoons pub in Stourbridge. Bottles of spirits were stolen from the Chequers Inn, on High Street. Police were called at 4.30am on Wednesday, February 22. Call police on 101 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Armed police prepare to combat terrorist threat

A DRAMATIC staging of a response to a terrorist attack took place at Merry Hill shopping centre in Brierley Hill, with dozens of armed police officers acting out the scenario of protecting shoppers and staff.

Assistant chief constable Marcus Beale has said 'recent national and international events' showed the need for police to test their plans to deal with terrorism.

The operation was kept under wraps as actors posing as victims laid strewn across the floor of the Dudley centre on Sunday after it had been shut to the public.

Police carried automatic rifles outside the Eat Central complex as fake explosions and fires were conducted inside.

Mr Beale said: "Routine exercises like this are important as they enable us to test our ability to deal with large scale incidents."

"I would like to thank intu Merry Hill and the community for their support."

He added that the exercise was not based on any threat or intelligence regarding the Black Country shopping centre, apart from general concern that shopping malls are on terrorist hit lists.

Last year a gunman in Munich murdered nine people during a shopping centre shooting spree. In 2013 67 people were killed when gunmen attacked a shopping centre in Nairobi, Kenya.

On Sunday Max Hill QC, the independent reviewer of terrorism laws, said that Britain faced a terror threat not seen since the IRA bombings of the 1970s, and that Islamist extremists were targeting UK cities.

He said that there was 'enormous concern' over the threat posed by British jihadis returning from Syria after fighting for the so-called Islamic State.

Controlled

A West Midlands Police spokesman said: "The area was tightly controlled and there was no impact on the public." Officers and security staff were on patrol during the night to reassure any local residents who may have been affected by increased activity, noise and presence of the emergency services."

Dan Murphy, general manager of intu Merry Hill, said: "We took part in a live training exercise with local emergency services to test their response to a major incident."

It was reported last summer that Britain's security services were probing at least four plots to commit terrorist atrocities.



Guns at the ready – armed police take up positions outside a restaurant at Merry Hill shopping centre



Police prepare to engage attackers as a 'victim' hides



Officers during the training exercise at Merry Hill

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15pc increase in temporary posts

TEMPORARY posts in the West Midlands rose by 15 per cent in 2016, according to a study.

Research by the Association of Professional Staffing Companies revealed permanent vacancies also increased, up five per cent year-on-year to January. There was a particular rise in temporary posts in the legal and IT sectors.

Julie Selby, of APSCO, said: "After months of increased optimism across the West Midlands, professional job availability in the temporary market has risen once again."

Mixed results on business rates

THE Black Country Chamber of Commerce says there will be winners and losers when the new business rates revaluations arrive in April.

The region's seven metropolitan borough councils will keep all business rates revenue generated from April 1 when the existing revenue support grant from central Government stops.

Overall West Midlands retail rates will go down 11 per cent on average, offices by 16 and industry seven.

Chamber chief Corin Crane said there was already a backlog of individual appeals against existing rates.

Charges increased by fire service

WEST Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority is increasing the amount residents pay in their council tax for the service by 1.99 per cent.

At a full meeting of the authority last week, members approved a budget for 2017/18 which means the fire service part of Band D Council Tax bills will go up by £1.11 for the year to £57.14.

In 2017/18, WMFRA will get £54.7m from the Government and will raise £39.4m via council tax.

Justice scheme cuts down on re-offending

A SCHEME tackling anti-social behaviour by young people across the West Midlands has helped 78 people since it started in 2014.

The Restorative Justice programme, run by the West Midlands Safer Travel Partnership, encourages young people to understand and pay back for what they have done, instead of prosecuting them.

Police said just one in 20 young people who have undertaken the programme have offended since.

Flying high on top list

COSFORD'S Royal Air Force Museum has been voted in the top 10 on a list of the UK's best-loved free attractions.

The museum came seventh out of 50 destinations. It's the highest-ranked museum on the list, compiled by National Express.

Churches and mosques charged for extra waste

CHURCHES, mosques and other places of worship across Dudley will now be charged for some rubbish collections.

Anything more than one wheelie bin or three sacks of waste will have to be paid for from April.

Businesses are also facing a rise in costs for waste collection, under changes announced by Dudley Council.

Bosses said the charges are necessary due to rising costs.

Places of worship will now have to pay from £1.20 up to £8.52 depending on how much waste is left for collection. However, one 180-litre wheelie bin or three sacks of rubbish will still be collected free of charge.

Dudley Council said it had written to 41 places of worship in the borough to inform them of the charges.

Collection charges to some businesses will increase by five per cent.

Small collections from businesses or factories, up to 10 bags of rubbish, will now cost £51.07 and large collections £96.40.

The council said its waste disposal costs had risen by 4.26 per cent.

The council's environment boss Councillor Hilary Bills said: "The council classes places of worship as

households in respect of their waste collection, and as such they are eligible for the same free service as our residents. However, any waste generated over and above this, for example from meetings and events being held in church halls, is classed as trade waste and is therefore chargeable.

"The charge is discounted to reflect the important role that places of worship have in our community."

Candidate wants to see revival of rail routes

TWO defunct Black Country rail routes will be in line to be reopened as part of a mayoral candidate's plans to bust congestion in the West Midlands.

Andy Street has pledged to bring the Stourbridge to Walsall line and the Walsall to Wolverhampton route back into operation – if he is successful in his bid to become the region's first Metro Mayor.

These two routes have been championed for years by rail campaigners, and the Conservative candidate has pledged to secure the funding to make it a reality. Mr Street has already backed the tram network extension to Brierley Hill.

He said: "The longer-term aspirations need to be ignored now. I want to commit to beginning serious talks around these two additional lines."

Mr Street has also pledged a major step change in investment in cycling and walking routes.

"The fact that the West Midlands is being strangled by congestion is well documented," he added. "Almost two-thirds of journeys are made by car and, at peak times, 81 per cent of cars have just one person in them. "Giving people a viable alternative to driving is the key to busting the congestion that is bad for people and bad for business. Investment in cycling and walking also needs a major boost."

Mr Street will be appearing at the Express & Star's Mayoral hustings at the Black Country Living Museum on March 7. See expressandstar.com for details.

Tenants urged to help run estates

A SERIES of tenants and residents' association meetings are being held across Dudley during March.

The council encourages the involvement in the running of estates.

The groups discuss many issues relating to their estates and discuss ideas of how they can help to make improvements.

Sessions are scheduled in Dudley, Halesowen, Stourbridge and Netherton. Anyone who wishes to attend or find out more can call 01384 815168.

Updates are regularly posted on housingtakecontrol.org.uk/ and at facebook.com/participationindudley. Residents are also reminded to sign up to the community council e-bulletin at community.council@dudley.gov.uk with their postcode and house number.

Cellist hosts concert for talented students

BRITISH cellist, conductor and principal of Birmingham Conservatoire Julian Lloyd Webber will be hosting a musical performance in Bromsgrove by Conservatoire students. It is at the Artrix Arts Centre on March 29 at 7.30pm. To book call 01527 577330.

8,500 more smokers stub out habit for good

By Jamie Brassington

THE number of smokers in Dudley borough is falling with almost 8,500 more people ditching the habit by last year.

New figures from NHS England show there were 45,500 smokers across the borough between April 2013 to March 2014, but this dropped to 37,000 between April 2015 and March 2016.

It comes as the use of smoking aids in the borough has also dropped by two thirds in the last three years.

Dudley Council leaders welcomed the drop which they said it was helped by the personal support that people can receive from stop-smoking services.

Councillor Rachel Harris, cabinet member for health and wellbeing, said: "We're pleased to see a drop in the number of smokers, aged 18 and over, in Dudley."

"This is in part due to the personalised support that people who access our stop smoking service receive.

Support

"Working closely with GPs and pharmacies, the service provides support, encouragement and practical solutions for people who want to kick the habit."

Councillor Harris said that pressure would ease on councils and the NHS as more people gave up the unhealthy habit.

She said: "Any decrease in the number of people smoking is good news for those individuals and also reduces the demand on council and NHS services long-term."

"We will continue to work together to help people who want to stop smoking find a solution that works for them."

The number of smoking aids prescribed by doctors in Dudley has dropped by around 4,000 since 2013.

There were 6,531 prescriptions of nicotine substitution therapy handed out in the borough during 2013/14. This dropped to 2,202 in 2015/16.

Seeing double at nurses' sister act

Twin sisters Alexandra Hanson and Sophie Germain both work as nurses in A&E

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Urgent bid launched to save mental health hub

COUNCILLORS have called for an emergency meeting to stop a mental health support centre in Dudley being closed.

Dove House, in the grounds of Bushey Fields Hospital, Russells Hall, is due to shut on June 30.

The centre currently sees around 60 patients regularly for support sessions and is open five days a week.

However, a phased closure is under way with the centre closing for one extra day per month before completely shutting its doors in June.

Councillor Stuart Henley, health and wellbeing spokesman for UKIP at Dudley Council, has asked for an emergency meeting with council officers in a bid to prevent the closure.

Leader of the UKIP group, Councillor Paul Brothwood, said: "This decision needs to be looked at again.

"The centre provides very cost-effective support for those with mental health issues. The effect of closing it is that we are going to see more people attending hospital. In the long-term, it will cost more money."

One of those who are relying on the support provided by Dove House, which is run by charity Dudley Mind, is Ken Parsons from Netherton. The 64-year-old said: "They don't realise that by closing Dove House, people will go into crisis and end up in accident and emergency."

Dudley Mind chief executive Martin Mueller said: "Our staff are working with people who attend Dove House to let them know where they can find mental health services elsewhere."

Planners reject homes scheme

A BID to demolish a Kingswinford pub and replace it with homes has been rejected by planning chiefs.

The Summerhouse, on The Portway, looked set to face the bulldozers but the move has been blocked by Dudley Council officers who ruled they were not satisfied with the housing plan due to concern over road safety.

They also criticised the 'cramped' design of the development for a total of 18 properties on the site of the closed down pub, so developers the Coyne Group have been sent back to the drawing board.

A key concern among planning experts was that cars parked at the new homes could restrict the view of motorists.

Seven properties approved on site

HOMES are to be built on the former site of a Halesowen haulage firm after plans were approved. Seven properties will go on the site of W Morris and Son at Narrow Lane. Plans were given the green light by Dudley Council.

Mother wrongly took £20,000 in benefits

A MOTHER claimed more than £20,000 in benefits she was not entitled to.

Emma Aston, of Stour Hill, Brierley Hill, failed to tell benefit assessors that she was living with husband Mark Aston and instead claimed that she was living as a single mother.

The 46-year-old claimed housing benefit from Dudley Council and income support from the Department for Work and Pensions.

She was paid a total of £20,684 between January 2011 and February 2015 which she was not entitled to. Wolverhampton Crown Court heard that when the claims were originally made she was entitled to the money. However, just a few weeks later, the couple were back living together.

Prosecuting, Gurdeep Garcha, said: "This relates to a housing benefit claim and an income support benefit claim where the claims were not fraudulent from the outset, but the claimant did not notify the authorities of a change of circumstance that would have affected those payments.

Reconciled

"She claimed that she was an unemployed single parent who had care of her young children with no other income other than what she had declared. It wasn't long after this claim was granted that she had reconciled with her husband and they were living together again."

He added: "This came to light in 2015 at which

point she had wrongfully claimed a large sum. She had numerous chances to tell the authorities that her circumstances had changed but didn't."

Aston, who represented herself, said: "I didn't know what he was going to do, whether he was going to stay or not. I was suffering with depression at the time and I am sorry for what I did."

She pleaded guilty to two charges of dishonesty, failing to notify a change of circumstances affecting entitlement. As well as paying the money back, Aston was ordered to do 100 hours' unpaid work.

Recorder Paul Atkinson said: "I don't think it would be right to send you to prison because of your clear remorse, good character and willingness to pay back this money."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Delays warning over 20mph limit

A MAIN road heading into Dudley has become a temporary 20mph zone and will continue so for a fortnight.

Speed will be restricted on Tipton Road in both directions until March 17. The speed limit will be in place between 9.30am and 3.30pm on weekdays while resurfacing work is being carried out. The limit will return to normal during peak times in a bid to keep disruption to a minimum.

The move could cause delays on the road which runs past the Black Country Living Museum to Birmingham New Road.

Valli tribute to boost hospice

SINGER Stephen James will be performing his critically acclaimed Frankie Valli tribute show for one night only in support of the Mary Stevens Hospice.

The show profiles the rise of the Four Seasons frontman in the style of the Jersey Boys stage show.

Stephen will perform at The Granary Hotel in Shenstone, near Kidderminster, on March 23. Included in the £24.95 ticket price is a full evening meal. To book tickets call the hospice fundraisers on (01384) 377 778 or email diane@mshfundraising.co.uk

Bev's jazz night at village venue

A JAZZ concert is being staged in Hagley, near Stourbridge, to raise money for the Mary Stevens Hospice and other Rotary charities.

The Rotary Club of Stourbridge is organising the evening with Bev Pegg and His Good Time Jazz Gang in Hagley Community Centre on March 18 at 8pm. Tickets are £15 via (01384) 371999.

The band led by Halesowen-born singer-guitarist Bev features top musicians from across the region.

Mayor hosting curry night for his charities

THE Mayor of Dudley will be hosting a curry night next month to raise funds for his nominated charities.

Aashiq's restaurant in Kent Street, Dudley, has agreed to run the event starting at 7.30pm on Tuesday, March 7. Tickets cost £20 for an Indian feast plus entertainment. Tickets are available by calling 07412 531924.

Profits will be donated to Councillor Mohammed Hanif's charities, which are Friends of Alfie Johnson, Dudley CIL and Diabetes UK Dudley branch.

Black Country art show

DUDLEY Canal and Tunnel Trust is hosting an exhibition by Black Country artist Ken wood.

His paintings of Black Country industry, waterways and family life are on show at the trust's base The Portal base off Birmingham New Road until April 14.

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OK now, for cinematic just ready very boring

THE BBC's latest big-budget costume drama has attracted some controversy, with viewers reportedly switching off after 10 minutes because they could not understand the mumbling characters.

Well, I managed half an hour before switching off because it was very dull.

Perhaps I should have paid more attention to the previews, where the words "CGI" and "cinematic" seemed to figure heavily. I do wonder whether these words are a secret industry code for "very boring".

Whenever a programme or film is promoted on the basis of its computer-generated imagery, or CGI, it always seems to be far more about showing off the technical prowess than coming up with an interesting story.

And cinematic just seems to be a euphemism for extremely slow. Endless shots of folk just standing around looking broody, or exchanging knowing glances at one another. Not actually doing anything, just looking like they might.

We can only speculate on what life might have been like in a Nazi-occupied Britain, but I really doubt it would have led to a notable increase in people going around glaring at one another, or moodily dragging on cigarettes in doorways before petulantly throwing the butt away.

The bloke I really blame for all this is Inspector Morse. Before he came along, detective dramas were slick, tightly edited, fast-paced and – exciting. Then when he came along it was all street scenes, random students walking about or riding bikes, with a bit of crime in between.

Maybe next time, somebody could come up with a drama that is a little bit less "cinematic", but a bit more entertaining?

□□□

A UNIVERSITY in Budapest has carried out research into people aged 18 to 24, and concluded that separating them for any length of time from their mobile phones resulted in symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress disorder.

Yep, you've read that right. There is a section of society which finds a few hours without being able to check their credit score or stare at a cute cat video as harmful to them as others do enduring some of the most unimaginable hardships in the battlefield.

The study found that three-quarters of those who took part showed signs of stress, including fidgeting and scratching. Of course, it would be wrong to tar all young people with the same brush, and we must remember how many of this generation have served their country with courage and dignity in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But the fact that millions are so attached to their electronic comfort blanket that they can't bear to be separated for a few hours is terrifying. Let's hope we never need to call them up for another war.

No Mr Blair, this time people did know how to vote



LUCY Brown who was asked for a cash donation after an uninspiring date



Tony Blair is calling for people to now change their mind over Brexit



Lord Newby says some peers do not have the 'stomach' to delay Brexit legislation

Thanks for advice Tony, now shove it

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES



respect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise?" It was Socrates, writing about 2,500 years ago. No change there.

THINGS to do on a rainy day. The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford has a folklore exhibition featuring "a collection of objects highlighting folk traditions of Oxfordshire including a Morris dancer's outfit, whit horns, lighting appliances and a lace maker's dick pot."

A READER asks whether I have any strong views of the Church of England's latest furore over same-sex marriages. Not really. It is hard to get worked up about the opinions of people who believe, without any evidence, that some benevolent sky-god is watching over us. I don't really care what superstitious people think about God, the Devil and heaven and hell, so why should I fret about their views on genitalia? As far as we can tell, the Church of England is morphing into a social club for people who just want to be sweet to each other, with none of that nasty, old-fashioned stuff about sin. More than 20 years ago I forecast the creation of the Church of Jesus Christ The Really Nice Bloke. I am sure it has a great future.

A READER says he likes the term "de-extincting," as applied to woolly mammoths, and wonders what other things might be de-extincted. He suggests good manners, respect for elders and Beer at Home means Davenports. Any other suggestions for the de-extinction list?

INCIDENTALLY, good luck with de-extincting respect for elders. The snag is that it has probably never existed. Who was it who said: "The children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show dis-

AN Appeal Court ruling this week suggests the law may soon permit civil partnerships, currently restricted to same-sex couples, for heterosexual couples, too. But could the whole process be overtaken by the astonishing rise of gender rights? There is growing pressure for people to be able to "self-identify" their gender. Lawmakers in California have proposed a

THANKS for your continuing accounts of truly awful first dates. A reader tells me of an over-confident lad who took his girlfriend on a hot-air balloon flight and romantically proposed to her at 2,000 feet. She turned him down. They were stuck in that balloon basket for the next 45 minutes with the pilot and by the time it landed the mood on board was positively polar. Moral: always plan your escape route.

LUCY Brown, a London-based clothes designer, had an uninspiring date through an online dating agency. She decided to let the man down gently with a text explaining she was not interested in a second meeting. She was astonished when the 'normal and sweet' man replied saying he was devastated and asking for 'a contribution for the drinks I spent on you'. She sent him £42.50 and made an equal donation to a donkey sanctuary. And they say romance is dead.

A READER writes: "I purchased a hanging basket of spring flowers this weekend. The instructions say: Keep out of draughts."

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TALKING POINT



Don't judge people by the way they look

I HAVE never really been a follower of fashion, as people who know me will testify. I wear what I feel comfortable in and cannot see the point of paying £50 for shoes or trousers when pairs for £10 or £20 do the same job, particularly as we are meant to be living in times of austerity.

That does not mean I don't care about my appearance. And, of course I have no problem with people wishing to pay over the odds if that's what they want. That's their prerogative, and if they can afford it, why not?

But remember, a trend is just that. Weeks/months down the line, everyone will be wearing something different.

Take holey jeans, for example. What are those all about? During a weekend away, I saw hordes of youngsters wearing these.

It was ironic there was a town nearby called Patcham – the sort of thing my mum would have done if I had worn holey jeans!

While on the same break I was served in one shop by a girl with hair of so many colours she looked like she had bathed in a vat of Skittles – and could have been the inspiration for a McFly hit. And she had so many facial piercings it was like talking to a pin cushion.

But joking aside (and I really am) it is these kind of attitudes and prejudices we need to stamp out.

So often we hear of girls pressured into being a certain size, or bullies hiding behind social media anonymity, all because their targets have different looks or tastes or beliefs to that of their own.

The shop girl I encountered was most helpful and pleasant, as one would expect.

Isn't it time we looked beyond people's appearances, be it tattoos, dress sense, size or whatever it may be? Let them be comfortable in their own skin. The old adages of 'each to their own' and 'leave people be' spring to mind.

We cannot expect everyone to look or dress identically, following the same football teams or be fans of the same kind of music, television programme or comedian, for example. Variety is the spice of life, they say, and the world is richer for it.

Some people like, and are even turned on by, body art, for instance. And, while that may not be my cup of tea, it does not mean I would have any less time for anyone with a scorpion inked on their back or some obscure Hebrew inscription on their arm.

Employers take note. I'm sure many job opportunities go begging because a candidate does not look the part, or has gaping holes in their ear lobes. It doesn't necessarily mean they cannot do the job.

Don't be intimidated or put off by these people, they are human beings after all. Oh, and they have feelings too.

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The big re-veal at last!

THE long-awaited announcement of the line-up for this year's V Festival was revealed this week – with Pink and Jay Z the surprise big headliners.

Rumours had been rife for weeks ahead of the announcement with the smart money seemingly on Ed Sheeran as the likely big draw, writes Diane Davies.

Meanwhile Drake, Kaiser Chiefs, Mumford and Sons and Mary J Blige had also been touted as possible headliners by the music press.

Both Jay Z and Pink have been fairly low profile in recent years musically. Raunchy American singer Pink has not had a solo album out since 2012 and not toured since 2013/14.

It is 10 years since Pink made her debut V appearance. Festival promoters say the 'pop icon' will be entertaining the crowd with her elaborate stagecraft and choreography.

Teens

With more than 100 million records sold and a 20-year career, Jay Z is one of the best-selling musicians of all time. Although the US rapper is almost better known as Mr Beyoncé for young music fans having not had a solo album out for almost four years. The 47-year-old has not toured since 2013/14.

He and wife Beyoncé recently announced that she is pregnant with twins but have not revealed her due date – though it is rumoured to be around the beginning of August.

The V Festival takes place at Weston Park in Staffordshire and Hylands Park, Chelmsford, on August 19 and 20.

Having gained a reputation in recent years as a festival focusing on the 'teen scene', last year's headliners were Justin Bieber and Rihanna, there are a number of acts which will satisfy the usual crowd.

'Godfather of garage' Craig David, Jason Derulo, Jess Glynne, local lads The Vamps, Sean Paul, Dizzee Rascal, Clean Bandit, James Arthur and rising sensation



Rapper Jay Z who will be headlining this year's V Festival



Pink performs at Birmingham's LG Arena on her last tour



The Vamps, with singer Brad Simpson from Sutton Coldfield, will play V



Making her fifth V Festival appearance will be Ellie Goulding

Stormzy have all been announced this week. Ellie Goulding will be making her fifth V appearance and there is a return for Rudimental.

Scouting for Girls and Busted tick the 'guitar band' box while Madness always provide a lively show and will appease the more mature members of the crowd.

Pete Tong was the first name released by the organisers, last Friday, as a sneak tease to the big reveal this week. Tong is one of the most success-

ful electronic dance DJs worldwide and will be creating the sound of summer to both sites with his Ibiza Classics orchestra show.

Tickets for V go on general sale at 9am on Friday. A weekend ticket will cost £175 plus fees.

As well as day and weekend tickets there are camping tickets – including VIP and 'glamping' options.

A 'pod pad' sleeping two people costs £1,366 while an Airstream Prince Trailer for five will set visitors back

£6,500. This does include access to the VIP area though.

Around 70,000 attended last year's V Festival. Headliner Justin Bieber found himself making all the wrong headlines over the weekend with claims that he was miming and had been out partying to the early hours.

● **What do you think of the line-up?**
Email us at wolverhampton.chronicle@expressandstar.co.uk or write to Chronicle Editorial, 51-53 Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

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Prison is now plagued by drugs and violence

VIOLENCE and drug problems have spiralled at Featherstone Prison because of staff shortages and 'significant prisoner unrest', according to a damning report released on Tuesday.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons for England and Wales (HMI Prisons) described relationships between staff and inmates as poor and said it was 'perhaps no surprise' the facility had declined 'so quickly and so sharply'.

In a 2013 report the prison was described as a 'very positive establishment'.

But, according to chief Inspector of prisons, Peter Clarke, the current senior leadership team does not have 'sufficient knowledge or oversight of some key areas', including use of force and the unregulated segregation of inmates self-isolating.

Mr Clarke said the only way for the prison to improve is for the leadership team to 'get to grips with the serious issues' identified in today's report.

Intelligence

The report, prepared after an inspection at the end of last year, said the prison had 'well-managed and analysed' intelligence that highlighted problems with drugs, violence and mobile phones, but that insufficient action was being taken to address the problems.

In regards to former 'legal highs', inspectors said the prison was not monitoring the 'full extent' of the problem and 'did not have a strategy or action plan to reduce drug availability' in general.

Inspectors also raised serious concerns around the living conditions of inmates.

They found that the segregation



HMP Featherstone - damning report released on the prison's sharp decline

unit had been damaged last summer and was still not usable, while the temporary segregation unit was in a 'very poor condition' and not properly staffed.

In the temporary unit, about half of the designated cells were out of use due to damage, and had been for a considerable time.

The whole prison was found to be in a 'poor state of repair'. This was reflected in the 'disgraceful condition' of showers and the state of the cells, which were described as 'dirty, poorly

ventilated, covered in graffiti and in need of decoration'.

Mr Clarke has now made recommendations to Featherstone bosses in order to improve its performance.

These include: Analysing all violent incidents and taking coordinated action; taking appropriate safeguarding action for those inmates self-isolating; monitoring the full extent of drug availability and putting an action plan in place to reduce the supply; and fully refurbishing showers and maintaining cells to an acceptable standard.

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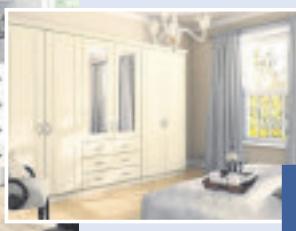
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Clearing the way for new business at industrial hub

WORK is gathering pace on a multi-million pound development aimed at boosting business in the Black Country.

The ground is being cleared at the Pensnett Estate ready for four industrial units to spring up.

The units will cover 130,000 sq ft and are being built at London and Cambridge Property's (LCP) flagship estate at Kingswinford.

The development, called Prime Point, is being backed by the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership, the joint body of business leaders and council chiefs tasked with encouraging new business and jobs in the area.

Once completed, towards the end of this year, companies will be invited to move onto the estate.

The foundations are currently being laid at the huge business park,

which is already home to 160 firms, with building work due to progress over the coming weeks.

Andrew Preston, LCP industrial portfolio manager, said: "Void levies on the estate are low and we are receiving enquiries every week from companies looking for units in this size range, so we believe that this first phase will be very popular with businesses looking to relocate to the area."

"This is a significant investment for LCP that will be a real boost for the local economy."

"We are excited that the first phase is under way and look forward to welcoming new tenants to the Pensnett Estate."

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The area of the Pensnett Estate where four major new units are in the process of being constructed

The most dangerous junctions revealed

THE most dangerous junctions in the Black Country have been revealed.

In Dudley the Cinder Bank Island has seen the most incidents with nine, while the Castle Gate Island has seen eight.

Councillor Hilary Bills, cabinet member for environmental services, said that plans were in place to improve the Cinder Bank Island.

She added: "The council works closely with police and other partners to identify, fund and carry out vital improvements on roads to maintain safer routes for all."

"In fact we are planning road safety improvements for Cinder Bank this year and are looking at opportunities for improved speed enforcement on Birmingham New Road."

In Wolverhampton, Chapel Ash Island, just outside of the city centre, saw 13 accidents during the same period.

A Wolverhampton council spokesman said: "We regularly monitor accident data and use the information to develop a programme of road safety improvement schemes as part of the Transportation Capital Programme."

Significant

"Over the years this approach has seen a significant reduction in the number of people killed or seriously hurt in Wolverhampton, from 126 in 2004 to 67 last year."

Elsewhere in the Black Country, there has been nine incidents on one junction in Sandwell. The junction between West Bromwich High Street and

A4031 Trinity Way saw eight minor incidents and one serious incident. The roundabout between the A457 Oldbury ringway and the A4034 has seen seven reported incidents.

Sandwell Council's cabinet member for highways and environment, Councillor David Hosell, said: "These figures include accidents that are caused by several factors – not just issues relating to the design of a road or the speed of vehicles. We look closely at all incidents and road casualty figures for this reason."

"In Sandwell we have an excellent track record for reducing road injuries."

"We've reduced the total number of casualties on our roads by nearly 50 per cent between 2000 and 2015, and the number of people killed or seriously injured is down 44 per cent."

In South Staffordshire, the Highways England run Gailey Interchange has seen nine minor incidents, as well one serious and one fatal incident.

Crafty pensioners find way to help zoo

A CRAFT group for pensioners in Dudley have been making wooden homes for animals at Dudley Zoo, including bats and penguins.

Senior Citizens Enterprise Woodwork Group, based at Meadow Road Youth Centre, spent six weeks building bird boxes, bird tables, bat boxes and penguin boxes.

Dudley Zoo conservation officer Chris Leeson said: "We're really thankful to the group members, who were all willing to offer their services freely and build the boxes for us. Their talents have saved us hundreds of pounds if we'd have had to buy the boxes ourselves."

Woodwork group chair, William Darby, aged 82, said: "We were glad to be of help and it's lovely when you know you're going to such a good cause."

For more details about the woodwork group contact Mr Darby on (01384) 620396 or email wdarby@sky.com

Roadshow for energy and telecom complaints

FED-UP residents will be given their chance to get complaints about energy and telecoms companies off their chests.

An ombudsman roadshow will visit the Black Country over two days to try and help hold companies to account.

The event will run at Market Place, Dudley, between 9am and 5pm, on today (Thursday) and tomorrow.

Visitors will be able to register any complaints during the event. Anyone requiring help is asked to bring along necessary documents and any correspondence they have had with the companies.

Ombudsmen help hold companies to account and can help settle disputes.

Lewis Shand Smith, chief ombudsman, said: "It's important that residents in Dudley know their consumer rights and don't put up with bad service. Complaining should be an easy, hassle-free experience."

"If you're still in a dispute with a company after eight weeks, ombudsman services can look into the case for free and provide a resolution."

The roadshow is touring the country.

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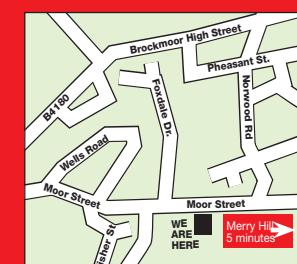
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Community role for church house

A CHURCH house which has been empty for decades has undergone a major revamp to become a community centre.

Bosses at the George Road Community Church in Oldbury decided it was time to bring the property back into use and saw it as an opportunity to support community groups looking for a base.

It has stood next to the church since the 1880s and had once been lived in by the church caretaker but has been empty for years. The house has been given a makeover and now includes activity areas, meeting rooms, an office and disabled toilets.

The centre was officially opened by Mayor of Sandwell Councillor Julie Webb. Church leader June Whitehouse said: "Nobody had lived in it for decades and it was falling into disrepair. The refurbishment was a £34,200 project. We are already seeing lots of interest from the community."

The project received funding from Ibstock Cory Environmental Trust.

Plans steam ahead for SVR Spring gala



Locomotive No.7812 Erlestoke Manor at SVR Steam Gala

A FESTIVAL of locomotives will mark the start of the Severn Valley Railway's steam season.

The railway will hold its annual Spring Steam Gala from March 17 to 19 and it will feature a top line-up of visiting locomotives, supported by members of the SVR home fleet.

Among the star locos visiting this year is LMS Ivatt 2 No. 41312, which is making its first visit to the Severn Valley track in 16 years. Also on the way is SR Battle of Britain No. 34081 92 Squadron and BR Standard 9F No. 92214, one of the most powerful locomotives in Britain.

The fantastic selection of visiting locomotives will be supported by members of the SVR's home fleet, including No. 813, No. 1450, No. 1501, No. 2857, No. 7714, No. 7802 Bradley Manor, No. 7812 Erlestoke Manor, No. 34027 Taw Valley, No. 34053 Sir Keith Park and No. 43106.

Visitors can take steam train and brake van rides, get on board evening services and visit the beer tent at Bewdley.

They will also be able to enjoy three new exhibitions at The Engine House Visitor Centre at Highley.

Visit www.svr.co.uk or call 01562 757900.

Police summit on how to tackle gangs

SPECIALIST police officers from around the country met in the West Midlands to discuss how to tackle gangs and violence on the region's streets.

The event hosted by West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) David Jamieson was held at Aston University. Its purpose was to inform delegates of the work so far by the PCC's commission on gangs and violence, as well as sharing best practice from around the country and assessing the impact of gang culture in the West Midlands.

Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner Ashley Bertie, who chaired the event, said: "This was a hugely successful event that took an in-depth look into the complicated issues surrounding street gangs."

"It explored key issues, such as how we can build stronger community links, developing a multi-agency action plan."

Also attending were youth workers, community groups and practitioners. In total, more than 100 people took part.

Surgeon is struck off after sending love letter to patient

A SURGEON who wrote a love letter to a female patient has been struck off.

Dr Sachiendra Amaragiri, 59, carried out a colonoscopy on the patient at Russells Hall Hospital.

Three months later, the doctor from Consett in County Durham, wrote a letter expressing his feelings to her.

The patient reported it to the police and, following a Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service hearing, Mr Amaragiri's name was removed from the medical register.

In a letter read out at the hearing Mr Amaragiri wrote: "When you stepped

into my clinic for the first time, I was suddenly stunned and taken aback by your presence. You induced this unusually extraordinary tender feelings of weakness in my emotional setting. To this day I have been unable to fathom this power you hold on me."

The tribunal was told the incident occurred after the woman, known as Patient A, was admitted to the hospital in July 2015 with stomach issues. She was referred to Dr Amaragiri and in September underwent the procedure. Amaragiri, who was not at the hearing, described his letter to her as a 'moment of madness' and expressed 'sincere regret'.

He wrote to the General Medical Council saying: "I never had or have any intention of causing any hurt in any manner. I did invite her for a social drink and I acknowledge this was a mistake. I reassure you I've not taken advantage of my position as Patient A's surgeon."

The tribunal stated: "Dr Amaragiri's failure to comply with the relevant professional standards was serious and his conduct brought the profession into disrepute. The tribunal accepts this was an isolated incident. However, doctors practising medicine are required to respect the dignity and privacy of patients."



Dr Sachiendra Amaragiri

Survey launch on hate crime

A SURVEY aimed at tackling hate crime has been launched by West Midlands Police, backed by West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner David Jamieson in partnership with the University of Leices-

The aims of the project includes identifying the support needs of victims, identifying victims' experiences of support services and identifying ways of improving existing support services.

Findings and recommendations from the survey and research will then be used to help improve support provision in the West Midlands and inform the commissioning of support services for those affected by hate crime.

Last week, new figures showed instances of hate crime had risen by more than a quarter in the West Midlands since the European Union referendum.

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Clever quiz holds the attention

Grange (E) TG

CHRIS Holton presided over the February 7 meeting at Grange Court, Prescott Road, Stourbridge.

She welcomed 26 members and two guests. Chris read the minutes of the last meeting which were approved and signed.

Treasurer Jill Attwood gave a breakdown of income and expenditure for the previous month. Secretary Jean Williams informed members that boards were going around regarding this month's meeting which is to be the AGM would include a fish and chip supper.

A board was put round regarding a proposed outing to Stratford with a river cruise and afternoon tea.

The entertainment for the evening was provided by guild member Jacqueline Hill. She held everyone's interest with a very clever quiz.

A small prize was given to everyone taking part. Jacqueline was thanked by Chris Holton for all her hard work which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Refreshments were then served by committee members and their helpers and the raffle was drawn with three lucky ladies winning prizes.

The next meeting, the AGM, will be held at Grange Court, Stourbridge on March 7.

The guild is still recruiting new members and any interested ladies can come along as a guest and will be made very welcome. Contact secretary Jean Williams on 01384 832439 for further information.

Acrobatic Bob is in pole position for talk



Mary Jones, Pauline Handley; Jill Buchan and Sandra Chappell.

Dudley South Ladies Luncheon Club

behalf of all members Ann Rogers paid her a warm tribute and presented her with a gift of silver earrings. Pauline Handley and Ann Rogers were appointed co-chairmen and other officers were re-appointed as previous year.

The speaker, now 88, finished by balancing on a pole which had everyone on the edge of their seats ready to catch him.

Meetings are held on the second Friday each month at 12.30pm, the next on March 10 with the Ukulele Band entertaining.

You can't abdicate and eat it

YOU can't abdicate and eat it is the title of the next talk at Sedgley Local History Society.

The meeting is next Thursday, March 9, at 7.30pm in St Andrew's Church, Bilton Street, Sedgley.

The speaker is Mary Bodfish, a favourite with local history groups and chair-

Sedgley Local History

crisis in 1936. The British Monarchy never fails to surprise.

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Welcome pack of goods as the refugees settle in

A FRIDGE freezer, hoover, six cereal bowls and a pressure cooker. It reads like a shopping list for a student leaving home for the first time.

But the household items are part of a three-page inventory list for Syrian refugees coming to the West Midlands and Staffordshire.

It is a template for a family of six, including a baby in a three-bedroom home. It breaks the items up into rooms including kitchen, bedrooms, living room and then additional items.

They include mattresses, smoke alarms, a hoover, dinner plates, and a washing machine. A thick double blanket, three-seater settee and energy saving light bulbs are also on the list.

Quotas

The inventory is part of a guide for location authorities given out by the Government as part of the Syrian refugee resettlement programme. Already, 51 refugees from the Middle East have been rehoused in Staffordshire.

In Walsall, the council agreed to take in 20 refugees up to May and in Wolverhampton, 100 will be bought in by 2020. In Dudley, two families moved in June last year, with the council agreeing to take in 20 over the next five years.

The programme was launched by the Government to help those families fleeing civil war in the country. Nationally, 20,000 will be bought in, with the programme designed to assist local authorities take in their agreed quotas.

Councils receive £8,520 per refugee accepted, plus £4,500 to provide education for every child aged five to 18 years. Further funding is available to the council for each refugee every year.

It starts with £5,000 for a refugee's second year, and ends with £1,000 for the fifth year. Councils are urged



The household items featured on a three-page inventory list

to consider the availability of school places, health provision and property market before deciding on the number bought in.

The authorities must ensure appropriate accommodation for new arrivals, then provide a 'welcome pack' of groceries reflecting their culture. A five-day timetable has also been suggested for authorities welcoming refugees, starting with meeting the families at the airport.

The guide suggests providing a £200 cash allowance for each family member before a guided visit to the Jobcentre, registering with a dentist and GP

and a tour of libraries, churches and train and bus stations.

Councillor Roger Lawrence, chairman of the West Midlands Strategic Migration Partnership, said: "Councils have received fully-funded packages from the Government and we are confident that will pay for all the associated costs.

"I want to emphasise that all refugees coming to this country under this programme have been vetted by government."

Councillor Lawrence was not aware of any Syrian refugees having so far been settled in Wolverhampton.

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Tours as nurseries celebrate milestone

THE secret life of award-winning flowers growing in Kingswinford are being revealed as special tours around their home have been launched.

Ashwood Nurseries based in Ashwood Lower Lane, between Kingswinford and Kinver, has been growing its hellebores for many years and has received international recognition for the many different varieties it cultivates.

Now, Ashwood Nurseries, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, has launched its tours of the hellebores' homes for 2017, giving visitors the chance to view some of the hundreds of colourful blooms on display.

Exotic

The aim of the tours is to give people an insight into the exotic-looking blooms and show them how to grow them themselves. The tours reveal the colours, beautiful markings and dramatic dark nectaries of the flowers, as well as the form and shape backs of the blooms, many of which are yellow or neon coloured, as well as purples, whites and reds.

Nursery owner John Massey also has some words of wisdom for those looking to grow hellebores in their

own gardens. He said: "Hellebores are easy to grow. They prefer a rich soil with plenty of available moisture during their flowering period, but they also require excellent drainage. They are after all 'snow-melt' plants and, if you can grow them on a slope, they will naturally be well drained."

"It's important to give them a sheltered site away from cold winds. "Hellebores will tolerate drier conditions in summer providing there is some shade but bear in mind that too much shade all year round can reduce the number of flowers."

"They are best grown amongst shrubs and trees which will give them plenty of light in winter and spring but which will provide some welcome shade in the summer months."

Mr Massey and the Ashwood team have achieved numerous prestigious awards including 52 RHS Gold Medals for exhibits, culminating in a Chelsea Gold Medal and Diamond Jubilee Award for a memorable hepatic exhibit in 2016. In 2010 the RHS awarded Mr Massey the Victoria Medal of Honour in recognition of his outstanding services to horticulture.

Visit www.ashwoodnurseries.com or call (01384) 401996.



Hellebore expert Kevin Belcher gets set for the hellebores tour at Ashwood Nurseries, Kingswinford

Violence as teenaged burglar is confronted

VIOLENCE flared when a burglary victim discovered that a teenager living nearby was responsible for the crime, a judge heard.

The victim was infuriated by the culprit tampering with personal items relating to her daughter, who had died from cancer aged five, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard.

She was later told a blood stain found at the scene of the February 21 break-in had been linked to 18-year-old Michael Hall, whom she knew was living nearby. Police were alerted when the woman's partner and two friends went to the culprit's house on April 10 in an unsuccessful bid to confront the teenager.

Officers did not stay after responding to the call because everything appeared calm when they reached School Road, Quarry Bank, explained Mr Patrick Sullivan, prosecuting.

Hall's 31-year-old cousin Ricky Smith had also been contacted and arrived with another man to take his relative away from the scene but the victim's partner and friends saw the trio leaving the property.

Stabbed

"Both groups met and an attack ensued during which blows were exchanged between the parties," continued Mr Sullivan.

One of those who had gone to confront the criminal was stabbed three times by a member of the teenager's group, who has not been traced.

Another was punched to

By John Scott

the ground and Hall hit the burglary victim's partner over the head with the bag he was carrying that contained a bottle, the court heard.

Miss Chiara Maddocks, defending, said Hall had been on drugs at the time of the burglary but was now clean. She explained that Smith had no idea of the background to the situation when he arrived to collect his teenage cousin. Smith had no previous convictions and had retired after 12 years in the army with an exemplary record.

Hall, now of Roseville Precinct, Coseley, admitted burglary and wounding on the grounds of joint enterprise despite not being responsible for the stabbing. He was given 22 months detention suspended under supervision for two years because he had already spent six months in custody on remand waiting for the case to be resolved.

Smith, of Martin Close, Coseley, pleaded guilty to assault. He received a two-year community order with 120 hours unpaid work.

Bid to rebuild restaurant

AN APPLICATION to rebuild Hickory's Smokehouse restaurant in Wall Heath, which was destroyed by a massive fire last year, been formally made to Dudley Council.

Clearance work has already started at the site of the barbecue style restaurant at the former Kingfisher club in Kidderminster Road. The smokehouse was devastated by an accidental blaze sparked by a fault in a refrigeration unit.

New waste transfer plant on the cards near trading estate

A WASTE management site looks set to be built next to land where the Environment Agency is continuing to investigate a huge mountain of rubbish.

The application for a non-hazardous waste transfer station on Shaw Road, Dudley, has been submitted to the council by MT Skips Ltd.

It comes as the Environment Agency continues its battle to remove rubbish left by Rowan Oak Waste Services Ltd, which has become a notorious eyesore in the borough. That huge pile of rubbish, estimated to total 3,000 tons, is just half a kilometre from Dudley town centre, and visible to motorists travelling along the bypass.

On the other side of Shaw Road, inside the Dudley Central Trading Estate, is the 2,100 sq m application site which is currently being used for the storage of skips and materials.

MT Skips wants to adapt the site's use to turn it into a transfer station and material recycling centre.

This would be housed in a purpose-designed building, containing a trommel that is capable of separating heavy materials such as soils and bricks from smaller wastes. These are then passed through a picking station where cardboard, metals, plastics and glass can be extracted.

The application states: "The use of the site for non-hazardous waste transfer is in accord with Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council Local Plan, policies and the Black Country Core Strategy.

"The provision of waste management facilities should make a positive contribution to improving the environment."

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£110m makeover for the Merry Hill Centre

MERRY Hill bosses are to spend £110 million on improvements at the shopping centre as they revealed they are near to signing a major name for the former Sainsbury's store.

Intu, which owns 19 UK and Spanish shopping centres including the Trafford Centre and Lakeside, bought the other half of Merry Hill that it did not already own for £410m last June.

Sainsbury's quit the centre at Christmas but intu asset management director, Julian Wilkinson, says talks are being finalised for a big-name retailer to take the whole of the 32,000 sq ft currently empty unit.

"It is an extremely strong retailer and talks have been going on for a few months," he said.

Intu's plans for Merry Hill involve creating more space to satisfy growing demand from retail chains for bigger stores – 20,000 sq ft to 60,000 sq ft in size – that carry more stock.



Bigger stores and more restaurants

Merry Hill has already seen River Island and JD Sports take up increased space.

Mr Wilkinson said JD Sports' 28,000 sq ft store was now one of its biggest,

while the New Look Men store that opened last year – one of the first in the UK – had also been 'extremely successful'.

Mr Wilkinson said there was 'pent-up' demand from retailers keen to take space at Merry Hill.

The company is hoping to attract more major retail groups that own several big brand names after its success at Manchester's Trafford Centre with a bigger Zara store that saw the fashion shop's owner Inditex introduce its Stradivarius, Pull&Bear and Zara Home stores as well.

Meanwhile, intu was also aiming to improve and increase the number of food and beverage outlets across the centre.

The property group is also funding improvements to the bus station that serves Merry Hill, with work currently under way.

Reporting its 2016 figures to the City last week the company said: "We believe the centre presents a significant opportunity to re-engineer and update the tenant mix. At intu Merry Hill we have several projects expected to cost around £110 million to deliver."

Take a lock at this canal restoration work



The old lock gates are lifted out by crane as part of the canal renovation work in Stourbridge which has seen stretches drained

OLD locks were removed and new lock gates were lowered into place by cranes along the Stourbridge Canal as part of a £120,000 works.

Eight lock gates are being changed on the stretch by the Canal & River Trust.

Brickwork is also being inspected and repaired at other locks.

The canal was completed in 1779

and brought coal and other supplies to the world famous glass industry.

Last week a key stage in the work took place at lock three, as the old lock gates at the bottom, and single gate at the top, weighing in at just over five tons altogether, were lifted out for replacement.

The renovations continue until March 17. The public will have the rare opportunity to walk into lock three on Sunday, March 12, from 10am.

costing a total of £23,000, ended their journey to the lock by boat, and were lifted into place by crane. The lock chamber was then drained and the team set about fixing any damaged bricks and stones.

The renovations continue until March 17. The public will have the rare opportunity to walk into lock three on Sunday, March 12, from 10am.



Don't ignore the warning signs.

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Racketball skills for beginners

THOSE looking to improve their racketball skills are invited to take part in a new course in Stourbridge.

Stourbridge Lawn Tennis and Squash Club, based on Sugar Loaf Lane, Stourbridge, is holding a five-week beginners' racketball course from today (Thursday).

As part of the course, the club will run sessions on Thursdays from 10am till 11am or on Saturdays from 1pm till 2pm.

New members receive a free racket when they sign up and there are free creche facilities available on Thursdays.

The course costs £35 for the full five weeks.

The club offers 14 all-weather tennis courts (including 12 floodlit courts), six squash courts, a state-of-the-art gym, clubhouse including bar, which is open every day and evening, together with changing facilities and a sauna. For more information call (01384) 393613.

Builder is fined after failing to finish rendering job on house

A ROGUE builder who took nearly £5,000 from a Brierley Hill man for rendering work but failed to finish the job, has been handed a court bill of almost £4,000.

Adrian Jones, of Pensnett, pocketed £4,740 but left the side and rear of the victim's home unfinished.

Jones had started work in June 2015 and then requested more payments, with five totalling to £4,740.

The 35-year-old, from Chapel Street, promised to complete the job before the end of July 2015 but only finished the front of the house, which was left with the old rendering removed

from the side and rear and scaffolding in place. He admitted to failing to notify the consumer of statutory cancellation rights and two counts of failing to exercise professional diligence by failing to complete the work and failing to return the money to the householder.

Deposit

Wolverhampton Magistrates Court heard on February 9 that Jones had quoted £5,000 to externally render the house and initially took a £500 deposit.

Jones promised the resident on numerous occasions he would return to complete the job, but didn't and failed to provide a refund.

The court imposed a 12 month conditional dis-

charge on Jones and ordered him to pay £2,500 compensation to the householder and £1,491 costs to Dudley Council. Jones apologised.

Councillor Rachel Harris, responsible for trading standards, said afterwards: "This prosecution sends out a clear message that we will protect consumers from the activity of rogue traders who flout the law and carry out sub-standard work. This kind of activity causes a huge amount of distress to the victims who have worked hard and saved to pay for improvements to their home."

Dudley Trading Standards, with Age UK Dudley, offers the Fix a Home list of approved traders, online at www.dudley.gov.uk/resident-your-council/trading-standards/fix-a-home/

Half-price offer on compost bin

BOROUGH residents in Dudley can be ultra-efficient with their composting if they take up the opportunity to buy a special bin at a specially discounted price.

The innovative Green Johanna 'Hot Composters' are normally £119, but Dudley Council has 110 units available for borough residents to buy at a discounted rate of £54, including delivery.

The pioneering system gives an opportunity to re-use both food and garden waste, turning it into compost in six months. It also uses a patented aeration system and thicker wall sections to ensure temperatures remain consistently high and is designed to protect against vermin.

To find out more or to purchase the system for the discounted price of £54, visit www.recyclefordudley.org.uk/food-waste.html

Doreens give market thumbs up



Doreen Tipton meets another Doreen, market cleaner Doreen Jeavons, of Brierley Hill

THE queen of the Black Country swept into Brierley Hill to reassure residents that its beloved market was not closing down but only changing hands.

Rumours about the historic market hall grew after it was announced it had been sold in a £1 million deal. But the popular shopping venue is still mostly owned by the Shapeero family who started it 90 years ago and now further investment is on the way.

Doreen Tipton spent three hours chatting to stallholders and entertaining shoppers.

Market caretaker Frank Chamberlain said: "There were a lot of laughs. She sat on one stallholder's lap and got behind the counter at the dog food stall. She was even selling underwear at one counter and was dancing with stallholders."

Concerns among traders about what the

future would hold began when the building, a landmark of Brierley Hill High Street, was put up for sale last year.

Mr Chamberlain said: "All that's happened is that the ownership has narrowed down to the people who are still interested in running it.

More

"The market itself is back on form. There are more stall holders coming in, the graffiti has gone, and there's a really good feeling about the place."

While she was at the market hall, the comedienne also collected material for a new book and DVD, called Doreen Tipton's Black Country, which is due to come out at the end of the summer. She spoke with many of the 100 stallholders, asking about their time trading there.

Project gives children flying start at school

FAMILIES are celebrating after completing a pre-school literacy course in Rowley Regis.

Cornerstone pre-school, which is based at the Flame Community Church, Cardale Street, organised activities designed to improve children's literacy skills and get them ready to start school.

The pre-school is one of 10 organisations across Sandwell to receive a £500 council grant, along with specialist training for its staff to help them deliver the special sessions.

The raising early achievement in literacy project was piloted in Sandwell in 2013 with funding and training from the National Children's Bureau. It is part of a Department for Education drive to improve the skills of two to five-year-olds.

Sandwell Council has promised to continue to fund the initiative, which chiefs say has proved a success with all children showing a marked improvement.

Motivation has paid off

A TRAINING provider with three centres in the West Midlands has been named as one of the 100 Best Small Companies To Work For.

It marks the first time that the Motivational Preparation College for Training has featured on the list.

The college is a Government-funded training provider that helps young people to build self-confidence, life skills and physical fitness in Birmingham, Dudley and Wolverhampton, using military principles.

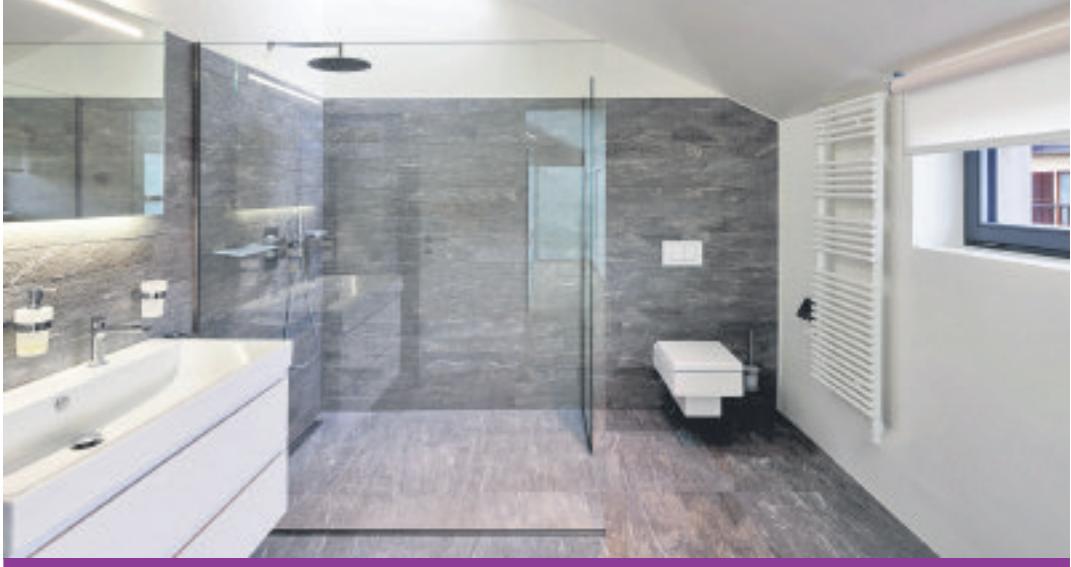
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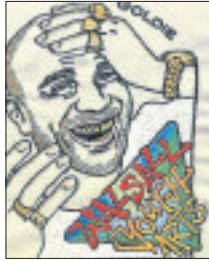
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Thread letter day for famous faces



Goldie and Noddy Holder feature on the tapestry



FROM Olympic swimmer Ellie Simmonds to music legend Noddy Holder and to fashion icon Erin O'Connor.

The famous faces of Walsall have been threaded in to a stunning tapestry by a team of volunteers.

The 11 unique tapestries represent each area of the borough, picturing events, places and names.

Each area of the borough had its own story to tell, be it the Pelsall poppies, meeting under the clock in Willenhall Market Place or the excitement of when Cilla

By Marion Brennan

Black came for the first Blind Date wedding. The tapestries also tell the story of celebrities including Paralympian Simmonds, Slade star Holder, musician Goldie, actress Meera Syal and Judas Priest lead singer Rob Halford.

They also include amateur athlete Glyn Marston, who has raised £120,000 for charity over the years.

He said he was honoured to have his name embroidered, even though it was spelled incorrectly as Marsden.

He is included in the tapestry devoted to Willenhall fundraisers, fea-

turing an image of the late Christmas-crazy Hilda Creaney whose festively decorated home raised thousands for charity.

Glyn's name and those of Reg and Anne Wrighton, who for years organised an annual old folks dinner for the Willenhall community, are stitched around the edge of Mrs Creaney's embroidery.

Mr Marston, aged 54, said: "It's a gesture that counts."

"To say that I am honoured is a great understatement, I can't believe that my name is alongside Mr and Mrs Wrighton and Hilda Creaney," he added.

"Mrs Creaney's fundraising, in particular, is legendary in Willenhall.

Thrilled

"I'd heard about the tapestry, which is a fantastic project, but it never occurred to me that I would get a mention. I was choked when I found out."

He added: "I did notice that my name was spelled wrongly but I haven't raised it with anyone - I'm just thrilled to see it placed alongside such great Willenhall people."

Mr Marston is currently gearing up to take part in a gruelling 1,400km cycling race from London to Edinburgh and back again at the end of July.

He will wear a jersey featuring the flag of his home town Willenhall throughout the journey, which cyclists have to complete in under 100 hours.

The father-of-two has been fundraising since 1993 when he quit smoking. On this occasion he will be raising money for the charities St Giles Walsall Hospice, Macmil-



From left, Colette Mumford, Glyn Marston and Sheila Fawkes



Actress Meera Syal



Rob Halford of Judas Priest



Brownhills model Erin O'Connor



Paralympian Ellie Simmonds



The Blind Date wedding, which Cilla Black attended, is depicted

lan Support, Cancer Research UK and Harry Will Walk.

He is also planning to cycle across Europe later this year in aid of charity.

Each one of the Silver Thread tapestries took at least 2,000 hours to sew, a task shared by an army of volunteers from the local community.

It was the inspiration of Walsall Council's creative development team, which was disbanded last year. People came from far and

wide during the first three months of the year-long project to have their say on what should feature in the tapestries.

Artist Hunt Emerson turned their stories into illustrations which were then stitched into more than 12 square metres of fabric.

Each square features a different area of the borough, capturing Walsall's living history and diverse geographical communities. It is currently on a tour of the West Midlands.

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Waste site boss hit with bill for £4,600 over breaches after failing to clear up

THE director of a waste disposal site in Kingswinford has been ordered to pay more than £4,500 after an Environment Agency prosecution.

Jaskaran Bhandal, director of Oakham Environmental Waste & Recycling Ltd at Oak Farm, Kingswinford, pleaded guilty at Wolverhampton Magistrates' Court to one count of failing to remove waste from the site, and one count of operating

a waste site without an authorised environmental permit.

The Environment Agency removed the firm's licence to operate a waste site in May 2014 after claiming there were a number of breaches, including having too much waste on site, no technically competent manager and significant amounts of waste tipped outside the permit area.

Clear

Management were told to stop operating and clear the site by July 2, 2014.

An appeal against the decision was refused, while a visit in November 2015 revealed that significant amounts of new waste had been deposited, brought to the site after the licence had been revoked.

A fire at the site in February 2013 saw 100 tons of rubbish go up in flames, and this followed a fire in April 2012 at the site.

Officers served a notice in May 2016 to remove all the illegally deposited waste by November 19, 2016. Officers visited the site on November 22 and noted some attempts had been made to remove the waste but the vast majority remained.

Bhandal admitted knowing the site did not hold the relevant permits. He also accepted he was unable to comply with the notice and said this was due to financial reasons.

In mitigation, the court heard that the defendant had pleaded guilty at the first available opportunity, had co-operated with the Environment Agency during interview and said that he was sorry for the offences.

Bhandal was fined £1,332, ordered to pay £3,265 costs, a £120 victim surcharge and was disqualified from being a company director for five years.

Funding blow at new hospital

SANDWELL'S new 'super hospital' is set to lose out on £12 million of funding each year for emergency care – a major blow to the facility before it has even opened.

Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, which will run the £350m Midland Metropolitan Hospital, said a 'scaling back of services' would have to be considered.

The proposed shortfall is set to hit in 2018/19 – the financial year when the Midland Met is due to open its doors.

Trust chief executive Toby Lewis said: "Proposals to reduce our income by £12m per year are a significant matter for resolution and we continue to work to find a way forward. The trust remains committed to making the Midland Met an effective emergency centre for local people."

Blue Ginger takeaway award



The winning team at Blue Ginger: chef Abdul Kadir with Waliur, left, and Foyzur Rahman

BOSSES at a takeaway restaurant are celebrating success after winning a regional award just 12 months after starting up.

Blue Ginger, in Moss Grove, Kingswinford, won Newcomer of the Year for the West Midlands region as part of the Master Chef Promotions awards.

Foyzur Rahman, aged 25, who set up the takeaway in December 2015, put his success down to his staff and maintaining high quality.

He said: "We are very pleased to have won the award. We have already built a good reputation with our customers."

Mr Rahman worked at his father's restaurant, Wombourne Tandoori, for five years before setting up his own takeaway, which he runs with his brother, Waliur, aged 24, and uncle Abdul Kadir.

Meanwhile, Wombourne Tandoori was crowned the regional winner of Master Chef Promotions competition.

Avanti launches a new-look showroom

Tribute to Sikh leader

A BLACK COUNTRY kitchen, bedroom and bathroom retailer has given one of its longest-established outlets a complete makeover to celebrate the showroom's 20th birthday.

Lye-headquartered Avanti, which is on course to hit £10 million sales in 2017, has invested heavily in refurbishing its iconic property in Brierley Hill, creating a state-of-the-art showroom.

The company, which achieved record turnover of £1.4m in January, will unveil the new design as part of an open weekend on March 3 and 4, where it will be offering a number of special promotions.

The revamped showroom has been designed to deliver a brand new customer experience, with 30 kitchen, bedroom and bathroom displays and some of the first 'lifestyle studios' to be installed in the region.

Lee Capewell, managing director of Avanti, explained: "We are continually listening to what our clients are telling us and they've asked for new ways of showcasing our ranges and 'on trend' designs that are going to be big in 2017. We've listened to them and our Level Street showroom is the first in a number of major refurbishments that will create an entirely new retail experience and one we hope will get people coming back time and time again."

Avanti also has showrooms in Kidderminster, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

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Gas station plan at site of pool hall

A GAS filling station looks likely to be built on the site of a former snooker hall in Dudley.

Dudley Snooker & Pool Club, in Stafford Street, was gutted by a fire two years ago. It has since been demolished.

Now plans have been lodged with Dudley Council to create a gas filling station at the site.

Three people would be employed at the station, according to planning documents submitted by surveyors BSP Design.

It will be used to supply liquefied petroleum gas to vehicles.

BSP Design expect 15 to 20 cars would use the station each day.

At the site, four gas tanks protected by barriers will be installed.

More than 50 firefighters battled the blaze which gutted the snooker hall.

Middle age mirth at hall

COMEDIEENNE Jenny Eclair's latest show will be visiting Dudley Town Hall in May

The 'How to Be a Middle Aged Woman (Without Going Insane)' tour is at the Dudley venue on May 18. The 56-year-old TV comic has appeared on Grumpy Old Women, Loose Women and Splash!

In 2010 she finished third in I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!

Tickets are £17, call (01384) 812812.

FOCUS ON DUDLEY TOWN CENTRE

Libraries preparing for new chapter as a 'staff mutual'

PLANS to introduce new ways of working in libraries and archives in Dudley have moved a step closer.

The Dudley Council-run library service, Archives and Local History Centre will enter into a 'staff mutual' – where employees have more control – in the spring.

The authority says that this will give workers greater freedom to introduce new ways to generate income, which they will be able to reinvest into staff training, update facilities and expanding the range of services available.

At the Dudley Archives and Local History Centre, on Tipton Road, the mutual will look at ways to maximise the exhibition space and create more events for the public.

The council expects the arrangement to reap financial savings across the board without impacting on day-to-day services.

Transferred

All council staff will be transferred over to the organisation. The council is now carrying out the formal legal work before the final process is complete.

Council leader, Pete Lowe, said: "We value our libraries and archives service in the borough and especially our staff who have

By Lucy Thompson

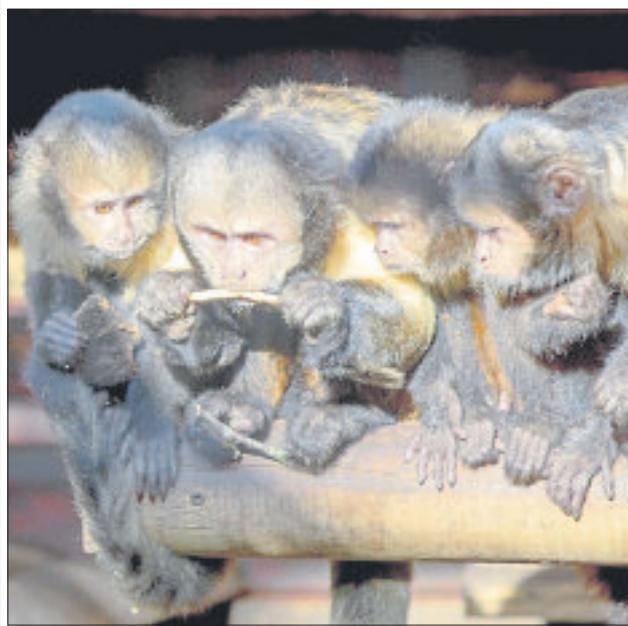
worked hard to deliver some of the best library services in the country.

"Unlike other authorities that are choosing to close their libraries, we are going down the route of mutualisation to protect them long term.

"The mutual offers an exciting opportunity to do things differently and I am confident it will achieve the best outcomes for our libraries and archives service users."

Greenwich Leisure was chosen as the preferred partner to bring their expertise to Dudley libraries and archives, running the mutual over the next five years.

The company has been running leisure and library services since 1993, and currently manages libraries in the London boroughs of Wandsworth and Greenwich, and in Lincolnshire.



The endangered yellow-breasted capuchins at Dudley Zoo are getting a new enclosure

Monkey see monkey lots to do at zoo

THE first stage of Dudley Zoo's £295,000 revamp has begun with work underway to create a new home for its critically-endangered yellow-breasted capuchins.

The outdoor area for the capuchins off the Small Private House is being rebuilt at a cost of £20,000.

Indoor spaces will give extra space as well as a climbing frame and high platforms for the arboreal species, while new glass windows will enhance viewing opportunities for visitors.

Curator Richard Brown, said: "Work is progressing really well. We've kept the capuchins inside while contractors have demolished the old exterior and are building the new enclosure, which will give the species lots of additional space when it's finished.

"The work is all on schedule and is looking fantastic. We hope to have the primates in their new enclosure in the next few weeks."

Museum was a top attraction

DUDLEY'S Museum and Art Gallery has been named as one of the country's best-loved attractions – two months after it closed.

It was controversially closed after more than 100 years to try and save money, despite fierce opposition in the town. It is now likely to be used by the council for conferences, whilst a new museum is to be opened in the Archives Building on Tipton Road.

The museum was named among the top 50 free attractions in the UK by travel firm National Express, alongside the likes of the Lake District and Hadrian's Wall, and declared the best in the Black Country.

Councillor Paul Brothwood, leader of the opposition UKIP group, said: "It was incredibly popular. I think the council will massively regret closing such a wonderful attraction."

Clothes shop in Poundland

A CLOTHES shop has opened inside the Poundland store in Dudley town centre. PEP&CO will offer women's, men's and kids' budget priced fashion.

PEP&CO managing director Adrian Mountford said: "We might be a new brand but we're one that customers love once they find us. By bringing PEP&CO to Poundland in Dudley, we're giving people access to the brand much more rapidly than we could on our own."

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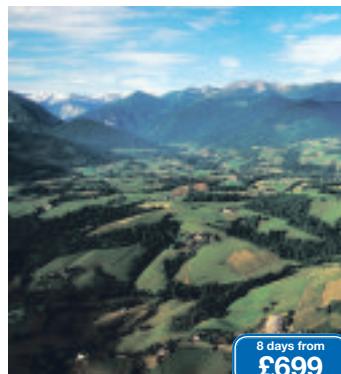


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The Master Chef promotion 2017 award recognises the very best South Asian cuisines around Great Britain, then it invites the chef of those restaurants together to compete in a gruelling competition outside their own familiar kitchen to a kitchen of the judges choice, where they need to cook their own dishes for world renowned judges like Rois Ali to taste and give their own judgement on the ingredients and culinary provided by the judges. So the chefs can only be recognised truly for the skills and creativeness they have as well as their uniqueness.

Mr Miah from Balti Dilshad was one of the chefs who were selected to participate in the competition having been nominated by his locals as well as the judges. Mr Miah wowed the judges with the dish he created called sea bass Palak Bahar. The dish incorporated his 35 years in the restaurant trade as well as his experience in winning several awards like Chef of the Year 2012 by Midland Balti Association.

Mr Miah was told of his achievement of Black Country's leading chef and awarded a trophy in West Bromwich. For this achievement the Deputy Mayor Councillor Dave Tyley went

to accept the award and recognise Mr Miah's achievement alongside Mr Miah himself.

Balti Dilshad now would like to welcome its customers to taste this excellence and dine in or have this wonderful meal as a take-away.



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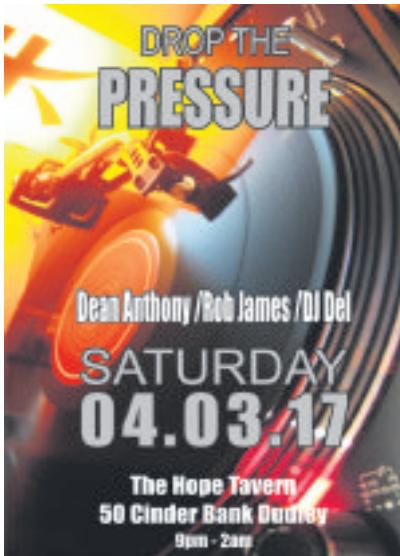
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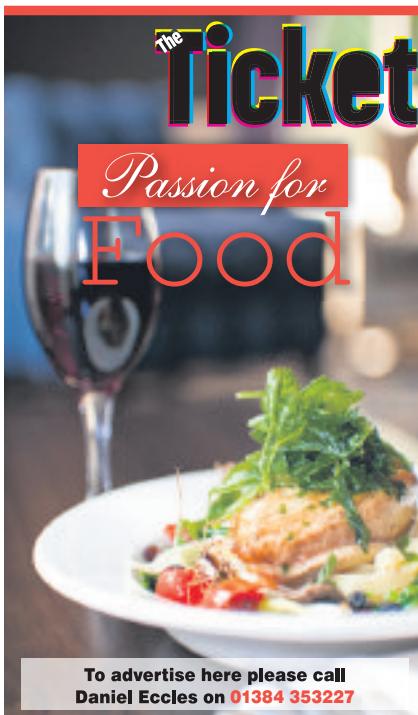
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Robbie's a pal but I still see old mates

He's so God Damned nice. Talking to Olly Murs is like talking to the ultimate cheeky chap. There's no edge and nothing unpleasant.

He's as unlikely to throw a strop as Mother Teresa, he's as unlikely to be caught with his pants down as the local lollipop lady. He's the antithesis of Kanye and Kardashian, the polar opposite of Katie Hopkins. He's as unlikely to demand a jar full of purple Smarties on his backstage rider as a lion is to marry a dolphin.

Good God, Olly, stop being so flippin' nice. And yet that's what the public admires about him. While so many who are thrust into the spotlight are dysfunctional and difficult, Olly is precisely the opposite. He is the archetypal boy-who-done-well, the classic boy next door who made it big.

Olly was working as a recruitment consultant at Prime Appointments, in Witham, before he featured on The X Factor. And he's still in touch with his old officemates now. The closest he'd come to stardom was appearing on Deal or No Deal in 2007. He wasn't much cop, taking home a tenner after messing up royally.

Like many kids, he'd dreamed of hitting the big time. But after forming a band, The Small Town Blaggers, that got nowhere fast, he pretty much gave up. And so, after his Deal or No Deal experience, he jacked it all in and went backpacking around Australia. Then, when he returned, he decided to have one last crack at fame. He rolled the dice in 2009 and is landed on X.

LUCK

"X Factor got me started, but I think for me it's just about hard work. I respect people and I'm nice to people and I've also had a bit of luck. People like my music and have bought into me so I try to give people a different sound and a different vibe. It's just been a great journey. I've been very lucky. I hate to say luck because we all know it isn't all luck. You've got to have a bit of talent."

Olly was the runner-up on the sixth series of The X Factor in 2009. His debut single, Please Don't Let Me Go, debuted at number one while his debut album was certified double platinum after shifting more than 600,000 copies. And since then, it's been one-way traffic. Olly has been moving higher and higher as he's shipped a colossal 10 million records, published an autobiography called Happy Days and released three further albums which have all gone to number one and achieved between two and four platinum discs for sales that have hovered around one-million-per-record. The only thing he hasn't done is fill his mantelpiece with awards. Olly has been nominated for six Brits and two Ivor Novello's, but always been pipped. Still, there's still time to put that right, especially with the release of his fifth album, 24 hrs.

"I think it's the best thing I've done, yes. It's certainly my best songwriting. I wrote it with some great writers and as a body of work it's the best thing I've come up with. Right now, I'm just looking forward to the fans listening to it."

"When you've done four albums, it's like what am I going to do for my fifth? Where do I go? So what I've always done in my career is try to move forward."

The new album will be accompanied by another megaton tour. Having stayed on the road from March to August with his last set of arena shows, for Never Been Better, which included three dates at Birmingham's Barclaycard Arena, Olly is back for more. This time he'll be playing the city's Genting. At

Olly loves the high life but he's Mur likely to be found in Essex



present, he's scheduled just the one date, for March 24, but don't bet against him returning for more.

"I'm looking forward to it," he says. "To do these sort of venues is fantastic and I never get bored of it. I always hope that one day I'll move up and play stadiums. That's certainly on my bucket list."

He's learned from the best in the business.

Olly was part of One Direction's Up All Night Tour in 2012, when he joined the boys in the USA. And he was also the special guest for Robbie Williams' Take The Crown Tour, in 2013, which earned \$20 million from nine shows and included four sell-out gigs at Wembley and the same number at Manchester's Etihad Stadium.

"Working with people like Robbie Williams and Gary Barlow has been great. It's always good to

work with people like that and get close, to see those guys going about their work. I'm grateful to them for giving me the opportunity to play on their tours."

"Hopefully one day there'll be a young singer on one of my tours and I'll try to guide them and give them advice and help."

Not that Olly takes his success for granted. In the fickle world of pop, he knows that what goes up must come down.

Though a crash is more unlikely than a bad dinner from Gordon Ramsay, he knows it might not last forever.

"I'm not a fool. I know that at some point it'll all be gone. But then it might not - who knows it might go on for the rest of my life. I'll continue for as long as my fans in the UK want me to. If I move into other careers, like TV or radio, that would be cool. You

You've got to tick all the boxes really if you want to get somewhere

don't know, the opportunities are endless."

For a cheeky chappy like Olly, they probably are. He's the sort of entertainer who'll still be around in 20 years.

The Nice theme continues when he's not on pop star duty. Away from the stage, he's a right regular philanthropist who supports his local Brainwave charity, which is based in his home town and helps kids with cerebral palsy.

"Giving back is massively important to me. When you're in the position I'm in where your profile can really elevate some charities then you can use that to raise money and help families and kids in need. I'm in the position to do that and I love helping, I love doing that. The charities that I'm involved in are all important to me.

With enough in the bank to live comfortably, Olly could slow down. He could swan off to some exotic isle and sip vodka, lychee juice and vermouth or mango daiquiris. Not that he does. When he's off duty, you're more likely to find him knocking about in Essex, where he still hangs out with his old mates. Olly may have Robbie Williams' number on speed dial, but he's just as likely to text his mates, Colin and Robbie, instead.

"I'm always at home in Essex. I'm always visiting my old employees, especially an agency I used to work for, Prime Appointments."

● **Olly is performing at The Genting Arena, Birmingham on Thursday, March 23, Friday, March 24 and Saturday, March 25. Tickets cost from £33.99. Visit www.theticketfactory.com or call 0844 33 88 222.**

Andy Richardson



Annette – no stranger to city



Billy reaches new heights



Annette is loving boinging back – to star in Billy Elliot

It'll be like a home from home when Annette McLaughlin lands in Birmingham to star in a six-week run of *Billy Elliot*.

The actress and comedian once spent every other weekend near the city, commuting from London with her then-boyfriend, Frank Skinner, to watch the Albion. *Boing Boing*, does that make her a Born Again Baggie. "Oh God, no. I was just a very, very good girlfriend."

Instead of the blue-and-white-stripes, her abiding memory is of the half time pies.

The West End star, who plays Mrs Wilkinson in *Billy Elliot*, the role made famous in the movie by Julie Walters, worked with

Skinner on TV's *The Frank Skinner Show*.

"Frank was my boyfriend and I used to go and watch West Brom with him," she says. "I enjoy football because I had three brothers and used to enjoy playing it as a kid. I used to go every Saturday with Frank and I loved it. I loved the pies most of all, that was my favourite thing. The gravy used to drip down my hands. They were delicious."

"We only used to go up for the weekend but it was great because he was such a massive fan of West Brom and was so proud of his heritage."

Heritage is a dominant theme in *Billy Elliot*. It celebrates life in a northern mining town. Set against the background of the 1980s miners' strike it follows Billy's journey from

boxing to ballet class, where he discovers a passion for dance that changes his life forever.

Sharing the role of Billy are Adam Abbou, Matthew Lyons, Haydn May and local boy Lewis Smallman, from West Bromwich. McLaughlin has been with the show for a year and describes it as a winner.

"Having seen it when it first opened in the West End, I just wanted to be a part of it. It's an incredible show and I wanted to play that part," she says. "When it came round it was an easy decision to make. I've been doing the show for almost a year on tour and I love every second."

The show runs at Birmingham Hippodrome from Tuesday until April 29

It's Bach to Hendrix at Kennedy special

World-renowned violinist Nigel Kennedy will make a triumphant return to his adopted home city of Birmingham with a gala celebration show at Symphony Hall.

The maverick Aston Villa-loving violinist will combine his greatest successes and new works for this one-off performance on Saturday, March 11.

Kennedy will perform a wide-ranging repertoire from Bach to Hendrix, world music to jazz, accompanied by a host of special guests including Bulgarian composer and virtuoso on the gadulka (stringed folk instrument) Georgi Andreev and world-class violinists Jean-Luc Ponty, Michael Guttman and Pieter Daniel.

Kennedy's unique talent and extraordinary ability to communicate with audiences have

made him one of the world's most popular performers.

Jean-Luc Ponty is a master of the violin in the arena of jazz and rock. He is widely regarded as an innovator.

Despite their different musical backgrounds, Kennedy and Ponty had the same mentor – Stéphane Grappelli, who saw in them the renewal of the violin. The encounter between these two exceptional artists promises to be powerfully creative. It will range from the acoustic to the electronic and with a repertoire drawn from the last three centuries.

Georgi Andreev is a virtuoso of the gadulka, a traditional Bulgarian bowstring instrument. Michael Guttman is an eminent violin soloist, conductor and music director of festivals around the world.

At the age of 10 he became the youngest student ever to be admitted into the

Brussels Royal Conservatory of Music and went on to study at the Juilliard School in New York with Nigel.

Another of Nigel's friends from Juilliard, Pieter Daniel, who made his orchestra debut at the age of 12, will also perform.

"This is shaping up to be an amazing concert," says Nigel. "Jean-Luc Ponty, is a genius. He is one of the greatest in jazz, ever. He is an innovator with a unique visionary spin. He plays on the harmonies, just killa. Then we've got Georgi over from Bulgaria too, it'll be special."

"And, of course my good friends from Juilliard, Michael and Pieter, will be joining me too. I'll have a strong relationship with everyone on that stage."

Ticket prices range from £25.50 to £68 for the 7.30pm gala concert. See www.thsh.co.uk or call 0121 780 3333.

Ladies – the times they are a-changin'

Menopause The Musical, an all-singing all-dancing comedy is on its way

The show about ladies of a certain age will unite one of Britain's best known singing sisters with three familiar faces from TV drama.

Maureen Nolan will join Cheryl Ferguson (pictured) who played Heather Trott in *EastEnders* with sometime member of the Loose Women panel Rebecca Wheatley, from TV's *Casualty*, and Penny Dreadful actress Ruth Berkeley. It is on at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre on Thursday, March 9.



Gig choice? Listen to what Mama Said . . .

Mama Said and 7 Years outfit Lukas Graham, from Denmark, bring their soul-pop to Birmingham O2 Academy on Sunday and the same night Traffic co-founder Dave Mason brings his Traffic Jam to Bilton's Robin 2. In Digbeth, Leeds indie rockers The Pigeon Detectives play the O2 Institute on Wednesday, with Lucy Spraggan on Thursday and Oxford's Glass Animals on Friday. Leamington Spa singer-songwriter Joe Dolman (pictured) plays the Sunflower Lounge in Brum on Thursday. Dutch Uncles play the Hare and Hounds in Kings Heath on Monday.



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NATIONAL HOLIDAYS

SUNDAY'S TV MARCH 5

CHOICE

BBC1



Dara Ó Briain (left)

Robot Wars (BBC2, 7pm)

New series. Dara Ó Briain and Angela Scanlon present the first group heat, with eight teams facing off through two group battles in the arena for a place in the grand final. A new twist on the format sees random house robots being sent to attack the competitors if they stray into the wrong part of the arena. Jonathan Pearce commentates on the action, while Professor Noel Sharkey, Dr Lucy Rogers and Professor Sethu Vijayakumar judge the operators' skills and select a victor in the case of an uncertain outcome.

10.00 BBC News. 10.20 Regional Programme.

10.30 Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the day's Premier League action, which featured Tottenham Hotspur v Everton at White Hart Lane, and Sunderland v Manchester City at The Stadium of Light.

11.35 American High School. A student whose father is in prison has developed his own business.

12.20 The Celebrity Apprentice USA. 1.45 Weather for the Week Ahead. 1.50 BBC News.

1.55 This is BBC Two.

BBC2

6.00 Breakfast. 7.30 Match of the Day. (R) 9.00 The Andrew Marr Show. 10.00 The Big Questions. 11.00 Regional Programme. 12.15 Bargain Hunt. (R) 1.00 BBC News; Weather. 1.15 Homes Under the Hammer. (R) 2.15 Flop It! (R) 3.15 Escape to the Country. (R) 4.00 Songs of Praise. 4.35 Show Well for Less? (R) 5.35 BBC News. 5.50 Regional Programme.

6.00 The Big Painting Challenge. Mariella Frostrup and Richard Coles present the show from the National Portrait Gallery, where the artists face two of their hardest challenges. Firstly, they have to produce a self-portrait, most of which seem to capture the subject looking afraid. They are then joined by sitters Angela Rippon and Floeela Benjamin and challenged to capture their famous faces accurately on canvas.

7.00 Countryfile. The team explores the South Downs. Helen Skelton discovers why dark skies are important for animals, John Craven visits the Bloomsbury Group's rural retreat, and Matt Baker meets a pony that is blazing a trail across the landscape. Tom Heap travels to Spain to get to the bottom of Britain's vegetable crisis, and Adam Henson investigates new ways to stop cattle from roaming.

8.00 Call the Midwife. Dr Turner helps a couple whose daughter was born without limbs to have her fitted for prosthetics – but the experience provokes different reactions from her mother and father.

9.00 9.55-6.00. Archer tracks down Spode, who confesses to murdering his brother, before going in search of the missing atomic bomb plans – but the resistance are still targeting him.

10.00 BBC News.

10.20 Regional Programme.

10.30 Match of the Day 2. Mark Chapman reviews the day's Premier League action, which featured Tottenham Hotspur v Everton at White Hart Lane, and Sunderland v Manchester City at The Stadium of Light.

11.35 American High School. A student whose father is in prison has developed his own business.

12.20 The Celebrity Apprentice USA. 1.45 Weather for the Week Ahead. 1.50 BBC News.

1.55 This is BBC Two.

ITV

6.30 A to Z of TV Gardening. (R) 7.15 An Island Parish. (R) 7.45 Around the World in 80 Gardens. (R) 8.45 Countryside. (R) 9.45 Saturday Kitchen. 9.55 Best Bits. 11.15 Nigel Slater's Dish of the Day. 11.45 Nigel Slater's Dish of the Day. 12.15 Nigel Slater's Dish of the Day. 12.30 1.00 Triathlon. 2.30 Live Athletics: European Indoor Championships. Gabby Logan presents coverage of the third and final day from the Kombank Arena in Belgrade, Serbia, where medals are awarded in 11 events. The finals of the women's and men's 800m, 3,000m and 4x400m relay will all take place on this concluding day, in addition to the women's 60m and long jump, plus the men's high jump and triple jump, and the conclusion of the heptathlon. With commentary and analysis from Steve Backley, Steve Cran, Colin Jackson, Denise Lewis and Paula Radcliffe.

6.00 Robot Wars. New series. Dara Ó Briain and Angela Scanlon present the first group heat, with eight teams battling it out for a place in the grand final. With commentary by Jonathan Pearce.

8.00 Top Gear. New series. Another helping of four-wheel features, including test drives and reports on the latest models, plus a celebrity taking to the show's test track in Star in a Reasonably Priced Car.

9.00 Special Forces – Ultimate Hell Week. The seven remaining contestants arrive in Australia for the final challenge, where they must undergo a grueling training with the Special Air Service Regiment – but must first undergo a grueling exercise to see if they are physically prepared for what is to come.

Those that make it through this stage face tactical interrogation and an endurance race wearing weighted rucksacks. Last in the series.

10.00 ITV News; Weather.

10.20 The Nightly Show Best Bits. New series. Highlights from the previous week.

10.50 Peston on Sunday. Political magazine, presented by Robert Peston. (R)

11.30 Film: Papillon. (1973) A Frenchman imprisoned for life on Devil's Island for a crime he did not commit makes a desperate bid for freedom. Fact-based drama, starring Steve McQueen.

12.40 Jackpot247. 3.00 Chopping Block. (R) 3.50 ITV Nightscreen. 5.05 The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) 4.50 This is BBC Two.

6.00 CITV: The Aquabats! Super Show!

6.25 Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) 6.35 Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) 6.45 Soothi. (R) 6.55 Super Stories: Share a Story. (R) 7.15 The Octonauts. (R) 7.25 Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) 7.30 Scrambled. 7.35 The Bean: The Animated Series. (R) 7.50 Ultimate Spider-Man: Web Warriors. 8.20 Horrid Henry: The Big Adventure. (R) 8.45 Teen Titans Go! (R) 9.05 Adventure Time. (R) 9.25 ITV News: Weather.

9.00 Countrywide: Guide to Britain. (R) 10.00 Escape: Hidden Italy. 10.55 Gino's Italian Escape: Hidden Italy. 11.25 Chopping Block. (R) 12.25 Who's Doing the Dishes? (R) 1.30 ITV News: Weather.

1.35 The Voice UK. (R) 2.50 Little Big Shots. (R) 3.50 The Chase. (R) 4.50 Tipping Point. (R) 5.50 Regional Programme: Weather.

6.00 ITV News; Weather.

6.15 Harry Hill's Alien Fun Capsule. Madcap panel show presented by the comedian, who presides over two teams nominally tasked with saving the planet from any potential alien invasion. (R)

6.40 Five Gold Rings. New series. Game show, hosted by Phillip Schofield, in which contestants compete to identify images on an LED floor while viewers can play along using the series app.

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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
GI Joe: The Rise of Cobra, Channel 5, 11.05pm
When a powerful experimental weapon is snatched by a mysterious terrorist organisation, two of the soldiers guarding it are recruited into a top-secret military strike force. As they go in search of the stolen technology, they uncover a plot by its creator to take over the world. Action adventure, with Channing Tatum and Sienna Miller. (2009)

TUESDAY
Deadly Pursuit, Channel 5, 3.15pm

An Alaskan wilderness guide visits a friend in LA, where he meets and falls in love with a well-off city girl. She clearly feels the same because when he returns home, she decides to follow him – only to come up against his ex-girlfriend and a sinister drug operation. Romantic thriller, starring KC Clyde. (2015)

WEDNESDAY
Two Wrongs, Channel 5, 3.20pm

Nurse and single mother Sarah struggles to balance her work and home life, but her worst nightmare is realised when her daughter Lauren is abducted while walking home alone from school and she faces a moral dilemma as to whether it is safe to save her child. Thriller, starring Gillian Zinser. (2015)



Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl, Friday, BBC1, 10.35pm

THURSDAY

Perfect Life, Perfect Lies, Channel 5, 3.15pm
Four young women meet up at a school reunion, where they unearth a time capsule in which they buried their deepest, darkest secrets. Inside the box is a revelation that unlocks the mystery of a tragic death 10 years earlier. Thriller, starring Kacey Clarke. (2016)

FRIDAY

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl, BBC1, 10.35pm
A buccaneer and a blacksmith commandeer a British ship and set sail in pursuit of a pirate captain who has kidnapped a colonial governor's daughter. However, their quarry and his crew are under a curse that turns them into living skeletons – and makes them impossible to kill. Swashbuckling fantasy adventure, starring Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley and Geoffrey Rush. (2003)

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Harry's new series is out of this world

Only a fevered imagination such as that belonging to Harry Hill could come up with the format of this extraordinary show.

Each week, two teams of celebrity guests are presented with an unusual task – to find a way of saving Earth from invasion and possible destruction by rogue aliens.

Often, when such a threat is depicted in a science fiction TV show or film, the extra-terrestrials seem to think they can take over the planet because humans are either a pushover or not worthy of their consideration – Hill wants to prove we're neither of those things by finding items that prove we are all good fun and therefore should be saved.

Along the way there are lots of gags, sketches and special guests who look on as amusing items are put forward for Hill's perusal and he ultimately decides what should be included in the Fun Capsule, and the more a team manages to have submitted, the more likely they are to win the game.

"It's great to be back on ITV with an all new format that finally tackles the problem of an imminent and prolonged war with space aliens, by proving to them that us humans are really a lot of fun to hang out with!" grins the comedian.

The channel's comedy commissioning editor Saskia Schuster adds: "We're really excited to have Harry back on ITV and we're confident that the human race will be safe in his hands with this brand new panel show packed with laughs, silliness and of course, fun."

The keyword when it comes to this series is certainly 'silly', but while some may think it's a derogatory term, it's actually used in its most positive sense here.

The world is a dark and scary place at the moment, and sometimes being able to forget our woes by just being plain daft is a wonderful thing, so Hill should carry on the good work as long as is humanly possible!

Last week's opening edition was both bonkers and hilarious in equal

measure, and there's no reason to think that this one won't be either. If anything, this week's promises to be even better thanks to an appearance by Kathy Burke, she rarely pops up on TV these days, so when she does, you know it's for something both close to her heart and worth tuning in for.

Although she has appeared in many dramatic roles, Burke remains best known for her comedy appearances alongside Harry Enfield, as well as *Absolutely Fabulous*, *Gimme Gimme Gimme* and *Walking and Talking*, a sitcom based on her own teenage experiences.

It's quite a coup to have tempted Burke back to TV – we suspect she may be a fan of Hill's and so keen to work with him.

She will be joined on the show by celebrity chef and TV personality Ainsley Harriott (will Percy Pepper and Susie Salt make it into the capsule? Stranger things have happened), comedian Joe Lycett and morning talk show host Lorraine Kelly.



Harry Hill's Alien Fun Capsule, Thursday, ITV, 8.30pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY

Mutiny

Channel 4, 9pm

New series. Nine men recreate a voyage by William Bligh in 1789, when he and his loyal crewmen crossed 4,000 miles of the Pacific Ocean from Tonga to Timor after being cast adrift from HMS Bounty by mutinous seamen and left for dead. SAS: Who Dares Wins chief instructor Anthony Middleton is in charge of a crew of eight made up of sailors and complete novices, attempting the journey in a replica 23ft open wooden boat, with similar equipment and the same rations of food and water that Bligh's men had. Continues tomorrow.

TUESDAY

The Secret Life of the Zoo

Channel 4, 8pm

At Chester Zoo, Rothschild giraffe Tula is a week overdue after a 13-month pregnancy. But keepers are anxious that history could repeat itself – she gave birth to a stillborn calf last year. Cameramen also follow this year's brood of penguin chicks. They are about to face the ordeal of joining the main pool, where they must compete for fish with the adult penguins. And baby silvery gibbon Eko learns how to swing between ropes - 50 feet up. All the keepers can do is watch anxiously from below.

WEDNESDAY

Hidden Restaurants with Michel Roux Jr

Channel 4, 8pm

It seems that for some chefs it's not quite enough to serve up new and unusual dishes – they want their restaurants to be out of the ordinary as well. In this new series, Michel Roux Jr is going in search of some of Britain's esoteric eateries, which are hidden within some truly remarkable locations. He's hoping the visits will inspire him as he creates a three-course menu for his own hidden restaurant, The Oast House. He begins in the south-west, where he ventures into a forest before checking out a floating café that is only accessible by boat. It turns out there are so many of these hidden gems, Michel needs help finding them all, so he also recruits Freddy Bird, who once transformed a dilapidated lido in Bristol into a restaurant, to check out some other unlikely venues, including a Latin American 'bustaurant'.

The House That £100K Built

BBC2, 8pm

Surgeon Gabriel Weston

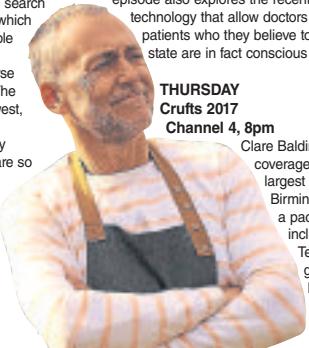
investigates the most complex

and mysterious part of the human body, the brain, meeting with extraordinary people with seemingly superhuman abilities. Dr Weston meets Derek, a man who was suddenly able to play piano after a head injury, and Paul, who has a hereditary genetic condition which means he can't feel pain. This episode also explores the recent developments in technology that allow doctors to identify if patients who they believe to be in a vegetative state are in fact conscious and aware.

THURSDAY

Cruffs 2017

Channel 4, 8pm



Hidden Restaurants with Michel Roux Jr, Wednesday, Channel 4, 8pm

competing in the Eukanuba World Challenge – a league of nations-style competition for top winners from different countries. Kate Beavan and Nim Patel team up to talk about dog health and welfare, Iwan Thomas reports on dog socialisation, and there's an appearance from cat-detection dog Molly.

FRIDAY

The Gadget Show

Channel 5, 7pm

Actor, presenter, voiceover man, comedian, DJ, poet and jungle inhabitant – is there anything Craig Charles cannot turn his hand to? For the next 12 weeks Charles will anchor the revamped Gadget Show from its new studio base in Birmingham. Tonight, the show's new host, tech journalist Georgie Barrat, kicks off a series-long challenge in which she endeavours to see if gadgets can improve the performance of Monkey Tree FC – an amateur football team hovering near the bottom of Division Two of the East Midlands Public Authorities League. Jon Bentley finds out how snappy Samsung's new 360 camera is by testing it out at a 'wall of death', filming motorcycles whizzing round a circular vertical wall at 40mph. Finally, Craig inboxes a brand-new Nintendo Switch, the much-hyped new games console, just one week after its worldwide launch.

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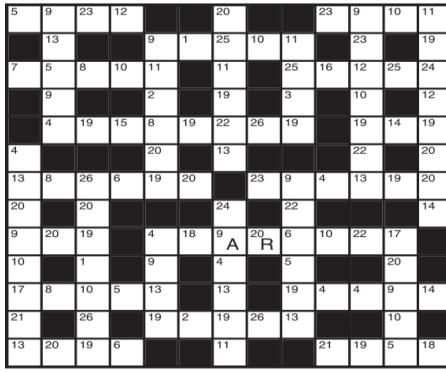
HOMECLAD

BRAIN GYM

No.418

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	Z	2	Q	3	R	4	O	5	E	6	B	7	T	8	C	9	I	10	L	11	W	12	Y	13	J
14	K	15	P	16	S	17	F	18	V	19	G	20	D	21	M	22	N	23	X	24	H	25	A	26	U

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

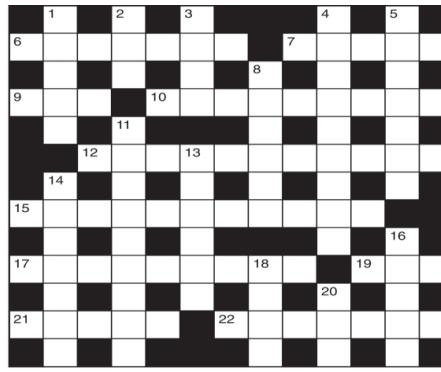
Cryptic Clues:

Across

6. Sole reinforcement (7)
7. Fish appears to be off! (5)
9. Animal found in decreasing numbers (3)
10. Holder of the post (6,3)
12. He tries to prevent ill-feeling among the crew (5,6)
15. Injury for which there is no earthly cure (6,5)
17. Eats in bar, perhaps, but he won't drink in one (9)
19. Howl for a type of rum (3)
21. Silly Annie gets confused (5)
22. Go ahead and give someone money (7)

Down

1. Certain to jump (5)
2. Close finish (3)
3. Asbestos should contain it (4)
4. They're a blend of the main races (9)
5. Its strength can be shown by proof (7)
8. The artist's sitting room (6)
11. It may give an edge to the news, possibly (9)
13. Wan friend takes cover (6)
14. Get together - for getting in the harvest (7)
16. Game that may come alight? (5)
18. A boy naturally opposed to the current trend (4)
20. He's had plenty of time to insulate the boiler (3)



Quick Clues:

Across

6. Income (7)
7. Advance (3,2)
9. Purchase (3)
10. Solemnize (9)
12. Association (11)
15. Calligraphy (11)
17. Dilatory one (9)
19. Attempt (3)
21. Haste (5)
22. Seer (7)

Down

1. Confute (5)
2. Acquire (3)
3. Heal (4)
4. Stand for (9)
5. Include (7)
8. Vanquish (6)
11. Made by hand (9)
13. Numbness (6)
14. Unfeeling (7)
16. Hail (5)
18. Trouble (4)
20. Fitting (3)

Sudoku



Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >
2 5 7 3 1 8 6 9 4
6 4 9 5 7 2 3 1 8
8 1 3 6 4 2 5 5 7
5 3 8 9 2 6 4 7 1
7 9 1 8 3 4 2 5 6
4 2 6 1 5 7 9 8 3
3 7 2 6 8 5 1 4 9
9 6 5 2 4 1 8 3 7
1 8 4 7 9 3 5 6 2

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 7 Made to measure;
8 Interred; 9 Item; 10 Chilli; 12 Latest; 14 Spiced;
16 Mishap; 18 Odes; 20 Comedian; 22 Get on together;
Down: 1 Pawn shop; 2 Revel; 3 Four; 4 Pendulum; 5 Assisted; 6 Free; 11 Indicate;
13 Seafarer; 15 Custard; 17 Sedate; 19 Diet;
20 Meek.
QUICK - Across: 7 Temperamental;
8 Funeral; 9 Role; 10 Barrel; 12 Cleave;
14 Lesser; 16 Tubing; 18 Pair; 20 Timorous;
22 Supplementary; Down: 1 Regulate; 2 Appear;
3 Urge; 4 Implict; 5 Untrue; 6 Wall; 11 Lengthen;
13 Vanguard; 15 Stripe; 17 Berate; 19 Abut;
21 Meek.

Quiz

- From which post did John Profumo resign in 1963?
- Who wrote the allegory The Pilgrim's Progress?
- In which country are the Pampas Plains?
- Which bird is called the chickadee in America?
- Of what is agaric a type?
- By what name do we know Michel de Nostredame?
- What is a quebracho?
- Which sport contests the Pilkington Cup?
- Which prominent politician was in the band Ugly Rumours in the 70s?
- What type of bird is a condor?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Inuits; 2 Sir Anthony Hopkins; 3 USA and Great Britain; 4 Click beetle; 5 Puma; 6 George Foreman; 7 Canada; 8 Franklin D Roosevelt; 9 Italy; 10 Anatoly Karpov.

Niner:

DOVETAILS

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

6347 gives a bird,
9728 gives a second bird,
651172 gives a third bird.



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Make a night of it

A real Gent – where would Olly go before a big night out?



Olly's at the Genting on Thursday, March 23 and our hearts are skipping a beat at the very thought of it. The Ticket's here to help you enjoy your date with the Troublemaker giving you the lowdown on all the best places to be...

EAT UP



Simple supper or fancy food, whatever tickles your tastebuds there's a dining destination to be found at Resorts World. But where would Olly go? We reckon he'd be up for a quick bite at TGI Friday's, with its American inspired fodder, it's grilling stuff. Think Chicken wings, Cajun shrimp, Jack Daniel's sesame mushroom strips and pulled pork sundae washed down with a bottle of Bud.

IN THE DRINK



There's no point waiting around feeling at a loose end before it's show time, Olly's a cheeky chappy and he's sure to be first up for a bevvy or two.

Head to the The World Bar where there are more than 40 craft beers on offer from ales and stouts to lagers and even beer cocktails.

Fancy a Jewellery Porter with a complex taste of coffee, chocolate and toffee with a delightful array of subtle fruit notes?

Yes please, we'll drink to that.

PILLOW TALK



LUXURY LAYOVER

Splash out and make a night of it and stay at the recently opened Genting Hotel right on site. Prices start from £97 to £297 so it's up to you if you go a little crazy on a room or completely wild in a snazzy suite. With bars, restaurant and a spa you could even make a weekend of it. If it's a night with the girls, enjoy some treatments and make yourself beautiful before you see Olly in action and then dream about him later as you slumber in style.

CHEAP SLEEPS

If you're strapped for cash then save your pennies by catching your zzzs at the Premier Inn which is a 25-minute walk away from the Genting. From only £35 a night it won't stretch your budget leaving you some spare cash for drinks and if you're a really big fan, any Olly merch from the gig. If he spots you in an I 'heart' Olly T-shirt he may well ask: "Dance With Me Tonight!"

TRAVEL LIGHT

WHERE TO PARK

Driving to the gig? Then there's loads of space to park right by the arena. Even better, if you pre-pay, you can avoid the queues at the payment kiosk and get to your seat a little bit quicker. No chance of you missing the support act either.

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If you fancy a few drinks or don't want to be stuck in traffic jams before or after the gig, then there's no need to drive. Trains run direct to Birmingham NEC from across the region making it easy peasy to get there on time.

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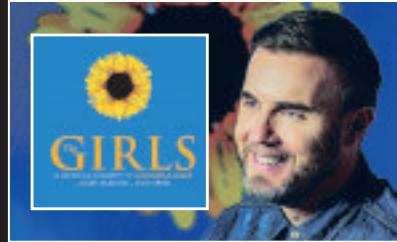
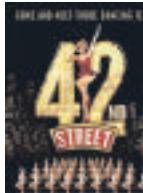
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Skoda Yeti gets extra trim levels that major on value



There's more on offer including digital radio

By James Parker

Škoda has updated the Yeti SUV with the addition of two new trim levels.

Dubbed SE Drive and SE L Drive, the newcomers sit above the mid-spec SE and top-of-the-range SE trims respectively.

According to the Czech manufacturer, both models add thousands of pounds' worth of extra equipment for three-figure price increases.

The SE Drive offers satellite navigation, digital radio, an auto-dimming rear-view mirror, heated seats, a heated windscreen and front parking sensors, in addition to the standard SE's climate control, rear parking sensors and Bluetooth phone connectivity. Škoda says the extra kit is worth an extra £2,295, yet with a starting price of £20,095, the car is only £935 more expensive than the SE.

The SE L Drive, meanwhile, comes in at £21,745 – £755 more than the current SE L – but adds leather upholstery, LED tail lights and 17-inch Origami wheels.

Up front, both cars are available with one of two engines: a 1.2-litre petrol and a 2.0-litre diesel.

The 1.2-litre unit is the entry-level powerplant, producing 108bhp and allowing the option of a six-speed manual or automatic transmission.



The 148bhp variant gets four-wheeled drive

The diesel, meanwhile, is offered in two states of tune, with the basic 108bhp engine giving the option of four-wheel drive, but limiting customers to a manual gearbox. The 148bhp variant, on the other hand, gets four-wheel drive as standard and can be specified with the automatic 'box.

● The Škoda Superb has added to its long list of industry and media accolades with another awards win. Fleet World magazine has awarded Škoda's flagship model its Best Upper Medium car title for the second year in succession.

Commenting on the Superb's triumph, the Fleet World Honours judging panel concluded: "With its upmarket styling, cavernous interior space and incredible value for money, the Superb punches well above its weight in this segment. Factor in some great engine options and it's impossible to argue with, increasingly taking customers from premium brands and with sales weighted towards higher trim levels."

Since its launch in 2015, the Superb has won 19 UK automotive industry titles, including Scottish Car of the Year, Auto Express Best Family Car and Estate Car, The Telegraph Best Family Car and What Car? Best Estate Car.

The Superb has proved to be an exceptionally popular choice with fleet operators and company car drivers since its introduction. Along with the Yeti and Octavia, the Superb range features a special SE Technology trim grade that has been specifically fine-tuned to meet the demands of fleet drivers and operators. Superb SE Technology prices start from £22,780 for the hatch and £24,060 for the estate version.



The Superb has added another trophy to its cupboard

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Astra now a top credible contender

By Antony Martyn

When Vauxhall reinvented the Astra back in 2015, everyone was pleasantly surprised. The popular but unremarkable also-ran had finally become the class contender we'd been waiting for.

Mixing impressive comfort with solid driving dynamics, top tech and decent build quality, the Astra is now a truly credible alternative to the segment-leading Volkswagen Golf and Ford Focus.

In trying to squeeze fuel economy from a petrol derivative, though, Vauxhall has placed its 1.0-litre, three-cylinder turbocharged engine under the bonnet. An official fuel economy figure of 64.2mpg and a 10.3-second 0-60mph time would suggest that the combination works, but does the reality stack up?

Once upon a time, the Astra was something of a bland euro-box, but ever since the striking and angular model of the mid-2000s, it has become something of a looker. The last generation was a sleeker and more curvaceous attempt, but the new model is a slightly more grown up effort.

It looks modern yet restrained, with our mid-spec test car offering trimmings of chrome to add a dash of class.

Inside, it's less button-heavy than some rivals, with our test car's touchscreen dominating proceedings. Build quality is solid enough, and the cabin plastics are generally good, but the odd cheap-feeling switch lets the illusion slide slightly.

The Astra's cabin is made up of hordes of dark plastics and austere expanses of cloth trim, which makes it feel slightly



It looks modern yet restrained

more cramped than it actually is. In reality, there's bags of space up front, and only tall passengers will feel cramped in the rear – children certainly won't mind spending a long-ish journey back there.

Boot space is decent, too, with the 370-litre volume falling an almost unnoticeable 10 litres short of the VW Golf's load bay. It's a very useable space that's more than happy to take a family's weekend luggage.

Downsizing has been something of a buzzword in the car industry for years now, but there are those who still can't quite be convinced that a 1.0-litre engine is really big enough to propel a family car.

Amazingly, though, the Astra is perfectly adequate in 1.0-litre guise. It's by no means the pick of the engine range, but it's far better than you might expect. Admittedly, the 103bhp output is never going to set the world on fire, and the chances of achieving the claimed economy in the real world are slim, yet it's a serviceable little engine that borders on being characterful.



Astra mixes impressive comfort with solid driving dynamics, top tech and decent build quality

It has quite a gravelly note at low revs, and that is fed back through the pedals, but at more adventurous speeds it settles into an amicable three-cylinder thrum.

The engine is, in many ways, a reflection of the car itself. It isn't the best driver's car in its class – the Mazda3 and Ford Focus surpass it on that front – and nor is it the best built, but it offers a very comfortable ride and

handles well enough to offer up a little driver enjoyment when you're pressing on – that's not an easy balance to strike.

Our mid-range 1.0-litre Astra test car came in at £21,205, and for that included goodies such as 17-inch alloys, air conditioning and satellite navigation, as well as the OnStar connectivity and service assistant – something usually reserved for more premium cars.

OnStar allows the driver to call an in-house call centre 24 hours a day to ask for assistance, but it also hosts a connectivity suite including a mobile WiFi hotspot that offers an internet connection for up to seven devices.

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Relegation fight aside Jones is back for talk

EVEN a survival mission at the edge of the Football League won't stop the first manager to take Wolves into the Premier League returning to Wolverhampton.

Dave Jones has a relegation fight on his hands after coming back into football with League Two strugglers Hartlepool United, writes Craig Birch.

The 60-year-old had been booked to appear at the Cleveland Arms Sports Bar, on Stowheath Lane, on Thursday March 30 before accepting the top job at the Victoria Ground.

But Jones has confirmed with organisers Sports Talk Events he will be in the Black Country as planned for the date, where he's set for a warm reception from a healthy pro-Wolves crowd.

Wolves legend Steve Bull will join him as a second special guest.

Jones was in charge at Molineux from January 2001 to November 2004. His crowning glory came in the 2003 Championship play-off final, where he masterminded Wolves' triumph and lifted the only trophy of his 20-year plus managerial career.

They emphatically defeated Sheffield United 3-0 through a first-half blitz at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff.

Trophies to hit road in cricket double promo

TROPHIES for the ICC Trophy and Women's World Cup are to hit the road ahead of this summer's cricketing tournaments.

Dates have been announced when they will take to the streets of the host cities. Sponsored by Nissan, the Trophy Tour will see both the ICC Champions Trophy and ICC Women's World Cup spend 31 days travelling around the seven cities. They will start in Taunton on May 2 and finish at The Oval on June 2 for England v Bangladesh. The tour will be in Birmingham from May 13-17.

ICC Chief Executive David Richardson said: "The Trophy Tour is the start of what will be a fantastic summer of cricket in the UK with two major back-to-back events – the ICC Champions Trophy followed by the ICC Women's World Cup."

The two trophies will visit schools, clubs, venues and landmarks throughout May. Full details of all the activities will be announced in the coming months.

Nissan Global Head of Marketing and Brand Strategy Roel de Vries added: "We partnered with the ICC to bring cricket fans closer to the excitement of the game."

I'm ready to bounce back, says Zaber

OLD HILL boxer Manny Zaber is ready to bounce back stronger as he returns to the ring on Saturday following a first career loss last time out.

Zaber suffered defeat at the hands of Josh Baillie in the first title bout of his pro career on November 19. The 22-year-old suffered a cut above his left eye, forcing his team to make the decision for him to retire in the fifth round.

The 'Pac Man' is set to return to the ring on March 4 at Walsall's Town Hall and insists he can't wait to get back in there.

"I'm ready to go now," he said. "I can't wait just to get back in the ring."

Saturday will mark Zaber's 10th fight since turning professional two years ago. He is joined by a host of Black Country boxers on BCB Promotions' No Guts, No Glory show.

Walsall super lightweight Luke Paddock headlines in an eight-round contest alongside Tipton's Ricky Summers, Wolverhampton bantamweight Kyle Williams also features.

There is also women's boxing on the card as West Bromwich welterweight Lauren Johnson makes her professional debut.

Ref Harry has no plans to blow full-time whistle

HARRY WORRALL may have reached another impressive milestone, but he has no plans to blow the full-time whistle on his refereeing days.

The 78-year-old from Deansfield has been honoured by the Wolverhampton Referees' Association for 50 years sterling service and is determined to add a few more seasons to his tally.

Football League official Ray Olivier checked in at the Clarendon to present the award as Worrall joined Alex Hamil and John Kyte in an exclusive club with 50 years under their belts.

And Worrall is still going strong. He can be found calling the shots from the middle or chugging up and down touchlines across the Black Country in the Midland Junior League, Wolverhampton Sunday League and Bilston Youth Partnership.

And the 'old school' virtues are still very much on display. While some modern-day refs relish being in the spotlight, Worrall has always been happy to go unnoticed.

A quiet word here and there and a relaxed approach have served him well over the years, and helps ensure respect on both sides.

Respect

"I have really enjoyed it, and still do. That's why I carry on," said Worrall. "I am not as fit as I used to be, but I still get around and I have a lot of experience."

"I have had a bit of stick at times, but nothing major. It's all about man-management and how you talk to the players. You see the refs on the telly pointing their fingers and shouting 'come here' to the players. I never did that. I have a quiet word and talk to them in the right manner and sort things out. You have to talk to them properly to get their respect."

"I hadn't used to dish many cards out, in fact I haven't shown anyone a card for 20 years. The good refs are the ones that you don't notice."

Worrall first got the refereeing bug in English football's golden year, 1966, when he swapped playing for officiating.

"I used to play for Star Aluminium in the Wolverhampton Works League," he said. "I played at right-back and then ended up in goal! Someone mentioned

SPORTING MEMORIES

By Nick Elwell

As long as I can get up and down the pitch, I will carry on."

that the league were struggling for referees, so I went along and took the course. Within three seasons I had got my Class One, which was the top rank.

"I have really enjoyed it and made some really good friends over the years. My only regret is that I didn't start at an earlier age. Who knows, I might have got to the very top if I had done?"

"I intend to carry on as long as I can. I still think I have another two or three seasons left. As long as I can get up and down the pitch, I will carry on."

Worrall has plenty to be proud of during his whistle-blowing days with a day out at Wembley one of the many highlights, while he also caught an early glimpse of a talented youngster by the name of Wayne Rooney.

"I refereed the final of a Coca Cola Tournament at Wembley, but I can't remember the teams," said Worrall, who also officiated in a girls' tournament in Minnesota as well as numerous local league finals.

"But I can remember taking charge of an England Schools game between Wolverhampton and Liverpool and Wayne Rooney played for Liverpool. I checked the name after the game because he played really well and looked a very good player."

"I refereed a Central League game at Wolves and Steve Bull played. He was facing a ban so he had a run out for the reserves against Peterborough and scored five times."

"I have had a laugh with him about that a few times over the years, he said it was the only time he scored five goals in a game. I was also the ref for former Wolves defender Frank Munro's testimonial."

Worrall is also a well-known figure around Molineux where he used to help in Wolves' press office on match-days.

Difficult

"The ref only has a split-second to make a decision. People should have a go themselves and then they would realise just how difficult a job it is."

Worrall joins Hamil and Kyte as the exclusive members of the Wolverhampton Referees' Association's 50 club and is proud to be part of an elite group.

"It's a real honour to receive the award," he said. "And I am proud to be a member of the Wolverhampton RA, it's the biggest and best in the country with over 140 members."

"Quite a few family members were there to see me receive my award and Ray Olivier was brilliant. It was a nice night and bit emotional."

WRA chairman Phil Reade was full of praise for his colleague's achievement.

"Harry is well liked by us all and what he has done is marvellous achievement," said Reade. "Ray Olivier said when he was on duty at Molineux, Harry always looked after him."

"It's unbelievable to still be refereeing at 78. He is one of those refs that says get on with it, it's a man's game. He used to man manage people really well."



Harry Worrall has been refereeing junior football for over 40 years



Awards ceremony – Harry Worrall with Kelvin Brittain



Harry at presentation with head of professional referees development Ray Olivier and chairman Phil Reade



What a save – when Wolfe's head came Harry carries it out for him

SPORTS DESK 01902 319531

Harry won't blow whistle on 50-year ref career

Page 39



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Perry's back on form with five victories

CRADLEY racer Tom Perry has been back on a bike for the first time since last season – and it was like he'd never been away.

Perry, who makes a return to the Heathens after two successful seasons on loan at Birmingham, romped to five wins in Scunthorpe's open meeting on Sunday. And he says he's raring to go for the new season with the Heathens looking to dethrone the Brummies in the bid for title glory.

He added: "I'm just really excited to get racing again now. I was back on a bike at Scunthorpe last weekend for the first time since October. It was only an amateur meeting but I won all five races and felt like I hadn't been off the bike at all to be honest. We've got some big meetings early in the season and it's important to get a good start."

The Heathens will launch their season with a special event with supporters at Cradley Heath Liberal Club on Friday, March 10. All the riders will be present and they will be handed their 2017 race jacket by Dean and Adam Bridge from local club sponsors Motor Market.

They will then travel to Perry's former club, Birmingham, for a challenge match on Wednesday, March 22 before hosting King's Lynn at Perry Barr a week later.

Their return to Monmore Green will come against Mildenhall on Easter Monday (April 17, 7.30) – and Perry can't wait to get started.

Perry is also relishing a battle for top spot in the Heathens team with high profile signing Danny Ayres level on his riding average going into the campaign. He said: "It's good to have two experienced riders at the top of the team, but it doesn't really matter too much who is at No.1. I get on well with Danny. We've known each other for a few years now and I'm looking forward to riding with him this season."

Skelding shines as Pedmore beat Envile by five wickets

IN the Kinver Indoor Cricket league, Pedmore (80-1) beat Envile (76) by five wickets. Envile batting first with openers Jono Howells and Tom Bingham put on 44 for the first wicket, losing next five wickets for 32 against some quick bowling from Paul Taylor and Dave Skelding. Captain Jono Howells returned to crease and tried to repair the damage but could not find batsman to stay with him.

Pedmore in reply the same as Envile got off to a good start especially Dave Skelding finding a bit of form lost their first wicket at 43. John Herdman then set about the Envile bowling who were finding it hard to contain the batsman passing the total with one over to spare.

Dave Skelding had a good all round performance with bat and ball in his three overs.

Hagley B (90-4) edged out Oldswinford (77-5) by 13 runs. Hagley B made a steady start losing first wicket at 37. Captain Steve Plant threw caution to the wind hitting some mighty 4s joined by Ian Moss to push the score to 77. Oldswinford captain Harry Stanier was the only batsman to show any fight.

Stour trio help England Counties win



Sam Baker, Nile Dacres and Pete White

AN ex-Stourbridge trio featured in England Counties 45-28 win over Scotland Club XV at Birmingham Moseley RFC, avenging defeat in last year's clash.

Featuring were replacement winger Sam Baker (currently with Ampthill & District in National League 1), 2nd row Nile Dacres (Plymouth Albion) and scrum half Pete White (Coventry).

England opened the scoring through hooker Matthew Miles but Scotland responded when George Taylor weaved his way through. Steve Leonard ran in to score

Rugby

but the final try of the first half went the way of Scotland wing Jordan Edmunds.

The second half saw Edmunds score again but England closed the gap through the boot of fly half Joe Tarrant. From the restart Leonard made a fed Leo Fielding to run it in. The floodgates then opened for England Counties with three further tries through Stokes, Fielding and Leonard. John Cox scored a consolation.

DKs in 'FA Cup' of cross country runs

AFTER bringing the cross country season to a close a fortnight ago there was one fixture left on the calendar for athletes from Dudley Kingswinford Running Club to compete in – and what a race to finish with, the National Cross Country Championship. It's the equivalent of the cross country runners FA Cup final.

With the race held on a three year rotation with the North, Midlands and South taking turns, this year was the turn of the Midlands with the race held at Wollaton Park in Nottingham.

More than 8,000 runners entered in various races across gender and age groups.

The ladies were off first running over a three lap course covering 8k with some inclines and long stretches of boggy ground. Helen Tromans was first home for the hoops in 30th place in 38.35, Hannah McGuire was 492nd in 42.49, Carroll Fisher finished in 47.43 to 660th place and Cilla Harding was 753rd in 53.52.

With the ladies teams restricted to just four runners, the DK ladies were placed 80th in the country of the 93 clubs.

With a couple of drop outs, the men were unable to field a team in an event where clubs needed to run six athletes to count but the four sixths of a team remaining still made the trip to represent the club knowing they wouldn't appear in the team rankings.

On a similar course to the ladies but a lap longer, Rob Sannwald was first back, getting the best of a prolonged battle with Mark Homer over the 12k course with each taking it in turns to lead.

Sannwald stalking his team mate for the best part of the last lap before coming home in 55.37 in 1031st place, Homer was only a few seconds behind claiming 1037th place in 55.44.

Yeltz are held to a draw at home

HALESOWEN Town 1 Barwell 1
HALESOWEN and Barwell shared the points in a competitive Evo-Stik Premier contest.

The Yeltz grabbed a 57th-minute lead when Ethan Delaney squared the ball for the unmarked Danny Bragoli to calmly convert.

The hosts almost doubled the lead five minutes later when Delaney steered just over the bar.

But Barwell hauled themselves level in the 76th minute when Mwanyongo drilled a low shot into the bottom corner of the net from the edge of the penalty area.

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GLASSBOYS IN POLE POSITION

Stourbridge 2 Stafford Rangers 0

STOURBRIDGE seized control of a frenetic clash to beat fired-up Stafford Rangers 2-0 and cement their place at the head of the play-off pack.

Goals from Jordan Archer and on-loan defender Dan Preston at either end of the match saw the Glassboys through but Boro more than played their part in an engaging encounter.

Within 90 seconds, Shrewsbury Town loanee Ethan Jones was slipped in to hit the crossbar from the right side of the box for the hosts.

Josh Gordon, understood to be on the verge of a move to Leicester City, appeared offside but cut back for Kyle Perry to spurn a golden chance for Stafford as Matt Gould saved at his feet.

The opener arrived when Stuart Pierpoint lofted a well-weighted ball for Archer to force his way through, round Adam Whitehouse and calmly finish 11 minutes in.

Perry's first-time hit towards an open goal from Gould's hurried clearance bounced wide and the visitors' big target man was thwarted at point-blank range when his instinctive near-post volley flew straight at the stopper.

The tempo remained brisk without any further chances before half-time and Stourbridge tightened things up after the break.

Leon Broadhurst narrowly cleared the angle from Tonks's long throw on 53 minutes as Rangers were kept at arm's length.

Preston later headed over a Tonks free-kick before the same combination sealed the points with seven minutes to play. A short corner was played to skipper Tonks whose centre was crashed home at the far post.

Whitby 1 Stourbridge 3

The Glassboys had to soak up pressure in the wind after conceding Dale Hopson's well-struck free-kick three minutes.

A long Tom Tonks throw was nudged home by Benbow on 56 minutes but Darryl Westlake almost gifted promotion rivals Whitby a second with a short back pass with Matt Gould called upon to save from Michael Roberts. From there, Stourbridge did not look back with Benbow involved in the melee that saw the second fly in. It was eventually credited to Tonks, who had taken the set piece. Ethan Jones made the points safe.

Nick is reaching great heights



Pole vaulter Nick Cruchley from Stourbridge in action at Sheffield at the BUCS National Finals

POLE VAULTER Nick Cruchley was delighted to get back towards his best as he bagged himself a bronze medal at the BUCS National Finals.

The 27-year-old from Stourbridge – a PhD student at the University of Birmingham – soared to 5.30 metres at the British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS) event in

Sheffield. "I got 5.30m and I was attempting 5.40, which is two centimetres below my PB, so it's good to be back up to where my PB is," said Cruchley.

"I don't know how many BUCS I have competed at, but this was probably the toughest one for me."

British Universities & Col-

leges Sport (BUCS) is the national governing body for Higher Education (HE) sport in the UK, organising leagues and competitions for more than 150 institutions across 52 different sports.

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